

CHINESE LITERATURE



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Front Cover: *A Lotus Flower* by Pan Tien-shou

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Writings of the Last Generation

YEH SHENG-TAO

Three Stories

How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm

1

The station was crowded with people each of them preoccupied with his own problems and looking not quite his usual self. The porters, hands thrust into the pockets of their numbered uniforms, stood motionless as if they had fallen asleep on their feet. They knew they still had a long wait ahead; it was not yet time for the tips they were hoping to get so there was no point in looking energetic at this moment. The oppressive atmosphere made breathing somewhat difficult. It looked like rain. The lights which had been turned on for some time were dimmer than usual and made everything appear as if in a fog.

A notice on the blackboard announced that the incoming express from the west was going to be four hours late. This notice had been read and reread several hours ago and now, like those old, torn theatre bills left to flutter in the wind, could no longer draw a single glance from anyone. Since such notices had been posted for practically every incoming train this week, they had become the thing to be expected.

This train which had been on the mind of so many people finally appeared. The sombre station became a hive of activity. We shall not go into the relief of the travellers who had reached their journey's end, the joy of those waiting for them, or the tips received by the porters. We are concerned only with a certain Mr. Pan who had come from a nearby small town, Janli. Before the train chugged into the station, he had managed to arrange everything to his satisfaction: He was at the head of his small family, his right hand holding a black leather bag and his left leading his six-year-old son. The child's other hand held on to his eight-year-old brother who in turn held his mother's hand. Mr. Pan said he would not be able to take care of them all unless they held together like this. For with hands linked, they could wriggle through like a snake wherever they wanted to go. He told his family again and again to lock their hands tightly; they were not to let go whatever happened. Lest the others should forget, he kept swinging his left hand as a reminder to be passed down the line.

It was good of course to form a line, yet not without disadvantages too. As the train slowed to a stop all the passengers with their luggage surged towards the door. In this exigency, the line formed by Mr. Pan and his family suffered for its length. Using his black leather bag to clear the way, he had pushed on vigorously with his chest and stomach till he was only two windows away from the door. But his six-year-old son was still four windows away, wedged tightly in between other passengers and the wooden seats. Arms stretching out in two directions and pulled vigorously from both ends, the child felt that his limbs would soon be torn off. "Oh, my arms, my arms!" he wailed in desperation.

The other passengers were not aware that there was a child wedged in between their legs until his cries reached their ears. A closer look revealed that the family of four was linked in a long line with hands tightly locked.

"Let go at once," ordered one passenger. "Or else you'll be pulling the child apart."

"What's this! Why doesn't the man carry the child?" muttered another, his tone full of scorn, as he edged his own way towards the door.

"No," Mr. Pan disagreed with them. There were good reasons for holding on together. He realized, however, on second thought that not everyone was intelligent enough to see these reasons and it was a waste of breath to argue with them. But the six-year-old was still yelling, "My arms, my arms!" Since Mr. Pan could see no way either to advance or to turn back, he had to be the first to violate his own admonition and let go of the child's hand. "Keep your eyes on me, don't lose sight of me," he ordered, flustered and worried.

The train stopped with a clang and a jerk. A number of people shot out of the carriage door and Mr. Pan felt the pressure from in front suddenly relax but the pushing from behind gained in momentum so that his legs carried him forward without any effort on his part. He meant to turn to rally his small forces but finding that impossible merely shouted at the backs of the heads before him, "Follow close behind me! Follow me!"

Somehow or other he too shot out of the door. Turning round quickly, he saw that his wife and sons were not behind him; they were still squeezed in somewhere in the train. Waiting by the door seemed to him the best possible solution. Another hundred or so passengers alighted before the screwed up, tearful face of his younger son appeared under the lamplight. Mr. Pan hurried up and, after being swept back several times by alighting passengers, picked up his son in his left arm and set him down on the platform. Another short wait and Mrs. Pan and the eight-year-old emerged. Panting heavily and uttering groans of pain, she turned her mournful gaze to her husband's face, like a child seeking consolation.

Mr. Pan was after all a man with some presence of mind. Now that his forces had been reassembled he issued another order, "We must link hands again. See what a crowd there is on the platform and look at that bottle-neck at the exit. If we don't hold on together we're bound to lose each other."

The six-year-old had had enough. Hugging his father's legs, he said, "Carry me, daddy."

"You little nuisance!" Mr. Pan was exasperated, but he restrained himself and, stooping down, picked up the child. He told his older son to hold on to the tail of his long gown with one hand and on to Mrs. Pan with the other.

Never before had Mrs. Pan been through an ordeal like this. The prospect of an even greater crush was more than she could bear after the effort of getting off the train. "If I had known it was going to be like this," she grumbled, "I'd have stayed at home and waited for death rather than come out and be a refugee."

"What's the use of regretting?" Mr. Pan's annoyance was tinged with sympathy. "Now that we're here, why regret? Besides, at least we're safe here. Let's go now. Mind your steps!" And all four together, they staggered into the crowd.

A frantic rush and Mr. Pan emerged as if from a dream through the narrow exit guarded by the ticket collector. Like a drop of water in a torrent, he had no alternative but to be swept along by the multitude around him, his feet barely touching the ground. In a moment he had cleared the wire fence of the railway station, stepped across the tramway and arrived on the cement pavement of the street outside. Turning round hurriedly, he saw countless faces pale in the lamplight and numerous bags and bundles rolling in his direction. Suddenly he realized that the little hand that had been clutching the tail of his long gown was no longer there; he had no idea when it had let go. An indescribable sorrow filled his heart and he automatically turned his head round. But there was no sign of his wife and son. He felt he had lost his family. The lights and figures round him began to swim as tears filled his eyes.

Fortunately the child in his arm had sharp eyes. "Mama, there she is," he pointed. He had spied and recognized the fringe over his mother's brows.

Mr. Pan was overjoyed. He first rubbed his eyes on the child's clothes before he looked in the direction pointed out for he hardly dared to believe the good news. After a slight search, he saw his wife darting left and right in the crowd, her hands held protectively round their older son. They were still on the other side of the tramway. "Ah-ta!" he hailed and hurrying over brought them back to where he had been standing on the pavement. Putting down the six-year-old at last, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Now, all's well!" he said, mopping his face. Indeed all was well, for once they crossed that wire fencing* they were insured

* Meaning that they have entered the foreign settlement.

against war, fire and robbery. Besides, he had found his lost son and wife. It was as if from the jaws of disaster he had rescued four lives and one black bag. All was well, indeed. Authoritatively, Mr. Pan shouted, "Rickshaw!" Several rickshaw men pulled up clamouring to know where he wanted to go. He raised his head slightly as if to add dignity to his words and waved two fingers, "Only two, we want only two." Then, having given the matter some thought, he continued, "Ten coppers. Who'll go to Fourth Avenue for ten coppers?" This ought to show them he knew his way around in Shanghai.

After a fairly long argument they got two rickshaws for twelve coppers apiece. Mrs. Pan got into one with the older boy and Mr. Pan climbed into the other with the younger child and the black bag.

The outstretched arm of an Indian policeman shouldering a gun blocked the way just as the rickshaw man straightened up to go. This fearful apparition made the child on Mr. Pan's knee hide his head in fright.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said his father. "That's only an Indian policeman. Look at his handsome red turban. We have to come here because we don't have policemen like him at home. He'll use his gun to protect us. His beard is interesting, look at it, like that of the arhats in the temples."

The child was too frightened to look even at a beard like that of an arhat. Only when the clanging of a tram caught his attention did he peep out and find that a very brightly lit room had swept past in a flash. On the other side of the road were also brightly lit houses full of dazzling objects. He finally raised his face from his father's chest.

When they reached Fourth Avenue they asked for a room at half a dozen hotels all of which had a big sign with the words "House Full." One glance was enough to assure them that it was no use trying to coax the manager into letting them have a room because temporary beds had been set up even in the lounge. Obviously the hotels were really full. At last, at one hotel they were met by a clerk who drawled lazily, "Want a room?"

"Yes, we want a room. Have you got one?" A ray of hope shot through Mr. Pan making him feel he had reached haven.

"We do have one. The last occupant vacated it only a moment ago. He has rented a house for himself. If you had come a few minutes later, it would have been snapped up."

"Let us have that room." Mr. Pan put his younger son down and turned back to help his wife and older son alight. "We are in luck after all," he told them. "We've finally got a room." When it came to paying off the rickshaws he generously offered one copper more than the agreed fee. It was his belief that if you treated others well when luck was with you, your luck would continue. But the rickshaw men turned out to be very ungrateful. They declared that they had spent a great deal of time taking them from one hotel to another so Mr. Pan must pay them five coppers extra each. In the end, the hotel attendant came out to mediate and Mr. Pan parted with four extra coppers.

The room was on the ground floor. Besides a bed, a lamp, a table and two chairs, it contained nothing but smoke. When Mr. Pan took his family inside, his nostrils were immediately assailed by the pungent odour of fried fish mixed with the stink of urine. "What a foul smell!" Mr. Pan muttered with annoyance. From next door came the sizzling of food frying in hot oil, the kitchen was obviously only a wall away. However unpleasant the stench, it was better than getting shot at or sleeping without a roof, Mr. Pan decided, immediately feeling better. He settled himself comfortably in one of the chairs.

"Want some supper?" asked the hotel attendant putting down the black bag.

"I want ham soup with my rice," announced the younger child sucking his fingers.

His mother gave him a severe look. "Ham soup with rice indeed! We are refugees, lucky to have anything at all to eat. How can you ask for this or that!"

The older boy was no better than his brother. "Now that we're in Shanghai," he begged his father, "I want to try some European food."

Mrs. Pan was furious now. Rounding on her first-born, she said scathingly, "The idea! You deserve to have nothing to eat. You should simply starve. . . ."

Mr. Pan was embarrassed. "Children don't know what they're talking about," he said, trying to smooth things over. He told

the attendant, "We had something on the train. Just bring us two orders of fried rice and eggs."

The waiter nodded in a non-committal way and left. He had no sooner got out of the door than Mr. Pan called him back. "Bring me a catty of Shaohsing wine and ten cents of smoked fish."

When the sound of the attendant's footsteps died away, Mr. Pan, looking relieved and uplifted, said to his wife, "Now we ought to relax a little and have a drink. Just think, we got away from a place fraught with danger to this haven where no harm can come to us. This is something to celebrate. Just now you two were lost and I had a hard time finding you. I was nearly frantic with worry. But Ah-erh was sharp." Mr. Pan pulled his son closer and gently stroked his head. "He spied you at once and I was able to find you. That's another thing to celebrate. Everything's wonderful so let's relax and enjoy a few cups." Beaming with pleasure, he raised an imaginary cup to his lips.

His wife did not reply. She was thinking of home. True, they had packed their valuables away and deposited them for safe-keeping in a church, but there were still a number of things left in the house. She was not at all sure whether Wang, the maid, was reliable. She also wondered whether their poor neighbours knew that her whole family was away with only the maid to watch over the household. She wondered whether the maid would remember to close all the doors and windows at night. She also remembered her three fat hens in the backyard, the pair of trousers she was working on for her younger son, the bowl of braised duck in the kitchen. . . . These considerations, flashing through her mind, made her extremely uncomfortable. "I wonder what sort of mess they'll make of the place," she sighed.

A feeling of disappointment swept over the children. Vaguely they sensed that this Shanghai where they had just arrived was not as interesting and fascinating as that Shanghai they had heard so much about from their parents.

Raindrops drifted in through the window. "It's really raining. Lucky it didn't start any earlier," cried Mr. Pan standing up to close the window. Suddenly he caught sight of the hotel notice on the wall which had been half hidden by the opened window.

Remembering a most important thing, he fixed his eyes unblinkingly on the piece of paper.

"My, my! Two dollars, no less," was his startled cry and he turned round to look significantly into his wife's eyes, gasping at what he had discovered.

2

When the next day dawned, the hotel attendants were still curled up in deep slumber on a few benches put together in the hallway. The narrow skylight did not let in much light. Dim yellow lamps were still burning in several hotel rooms. But Mr. and Mrs. Pan were already talking things over. The two boys, hoping that today's Shanghai would turn out better than the Shanghai of yesterday, had been awake for some time. Their parents asked them to sleep a little longer so they were still in bed tickling each other.

"I think you'd better not go back," said Mrs. Pan, very worried. "How can you be sure what they say in the papers is true? Since we went through so much difficulty to get away, there's hardly any sense in your going back right away."

"Actually, I had some idea that this might happen. Director Ku was never one to let things go. 'Since there's no fighting here, the schools must naturally start as usual.' Yes, that sounds like him all right. I know this correspondent too. He happens to work in the Bureau of Education. So, there's no question about the authenticity of his report. I'll simply have to go back."

"Don't you know it's dangerous going back?" Mrs. Pan's tone was quite tragic. "Maybe in two or three days they'll be fighting in our parts. Suppose you went back and got the school started, do you think the students will come to school? Besides, even if the fighting doesn't spread to our parts, you'll have a good answer for the director of education if he wants to know why you didn't start school. You have only to ask him: What's more important, the school or human lives? He is not immortal himself, he could hardly blame you for not going back."

"You don't understand," said Mr. Pan with some contempt. "This is the kind of argument that only silly women like you,

safe at home or in bed, can use. You don't expect me to go and say something like that? Now, don't try to stop me." His tone had become quite conciliatory. "For back I must go. There won't be the least danger. I know how to keep out of harm's way. Besides," Mr. Pan smiled at his own diplomacy, "weren't you worried just now about the things we left at home? Once I'm home I'll be able to keep an eye on them so you can stay here without worrying. When things settle down a bit I'll come promptly to fetch you and the boys home."

Mrs. Pan knew now there was absolutely no way to prevent her husband from going back. It would be nice to have him at home and keeping an eye on things but, in these uncertain times, once he left he would be like a pearl cast into the sea, she might never get him back. The sorrows of parting and fear of death overwhelmed her. Tears stung her eyelids and came so near to trickling out that she dared not even glance at her husband. It struck her at once that tears at this moment were a bad omen, nothing tragic had happened and she should not be weeping. Holding back her tears with an effort, more to comfort herself than in real earnest she said, "Then, just go back and see how things are. If the Bureau of Education doesn't say anything about starting the school according to schedule you just come right back, catching the afternoon train if you can and if not the early train the next morning. You see," here she could no longer restrain herself and one tear dropped on the back of her hand, to be hastily brushed away—"I worry about you so!"

Mr. Pan was feeling very vexed himself. Since the director of education wanted the schools to start as usual, he himself had no reason whatever to insist that they should remain closed. It followed naturally that he should go back. But how could he not worry about his family here? He noticed the look of gentle sorrow on his wife's face. It seemed heartless to leave a woman with two young children, so weak and helpless, without anyone to rely on. How could he be sure nothing untoward would happen to them. All this made him angry and disturbed. He was angry at those sending troops out to fight this army or that, angry at the director of education who talked about starting school without delay, angry at himself for not having a grown-up son who might have helped him out.

Nevertheless, he was not a woman, he had to look ahead. He knew that going back was the right thing to do. Forgetting his anger and without showing a trace of his inner disturbance, he nodded to show that he agreed with her. "If I find that the director has no intention of starting the schools, I'll do as you say and come back by the afternoon train," he said soothingly.

The children had overheard this last remark. The younger boy, his head half buried in the pillow, lisped babyishly, "I wanna go back too."

"Mama and daddy and I are going back and we'll leave you here all by yourself," teased the older boy, making a face.

The younger boy started to wail at the top of his voice, rubbing his eyes vigorously although there was not a single tear in them.

"You will both stay here with mama," said Mr. Pan raising his voice. "No more nonsense now. Get dressed and ready for breakfast." After a few more words with his wife, Mr. Pan set out for the station.

On the way, he heard passers-by commenting on the fact that trains were no longer running. "If the trains have stopped that settles the question for me. Even if they decide to fire me for staying away, I can't help it." The news gave him a let-down feeling. But if his luck held, it might prove no more than a rumour. To find out the true situation he was anxious that the rickshaw man should go faster.

His luck turned out to be good. There was no sign posted at the station saying that trains were suspended. On the blackboard a notice declared that the night train would be four hours late. It was still not in yet. The ticket window was far from crowded. From time to time one or two people stepped up to buy tickets. The crowd in the station was made up half of people awaiting travellers, half of spectators. Some carried cameras and were waiting to snap the bustle accompanying the arrival of the night train so that the pictures could be used in some future "History of Wars and Changes." The baggage room was filled with an assortment of bags and cases piled so high that they nearly touched the ceiling.

He felt both relieved and depressed. After a slight hesitation he bought himself a third-class ticket and boarded the train. The clear sunlight made the whole compartment bright but not hot.

There were plenty of empty seats. Had he wanted to, he could have lain down. He thought, "This is unusual. If I were in a better mood this could have been a very pleasant trip."

The train was held up at various stops to give right of way to troop trains. By the time he got into Janli, it was past three in the afternoon. Mr. Pan hurried home and found his gate tightly closed. The tension in his heart eased a little for this precaution was one thing he had tried very hard to impress on Wang, the maid, before he left.

He had to knock a number of times before the maid appeared. She exclaimed in surprise at sight of Mr. Pan, "Is that you back, sir? Is there no need to run away now?"

Mr. Pan muttered a vague answer as he rushed in and looked around. Then he unlocked the door to his room, strode in and examined it with care. No change. There was no change at all. Everything was as he had left it the day before. His heart which had been palpitating relaxed somewhat but he was not yet fully assured. He locked the room again and turned to go. "See that the gate's properly locked," he told the maid.

The maid was very puzzled. Having closed the gate, she went in and began to wonder. The master and mistress must still be somewhere in town. Perhaps they were afraid she might want to go with them and had only pretended to run away to Shanghai. "Otherwise, why is the master back so soon? The mistress and the boys are not with him. Where can they be hiding themselves? But why didn't they want me with them? Of course, it's because they didn't have room for so many. They are probably in that red building belonging to the foreigner. Those soldiers are all in the know; they will not touch that red building even when they are fighting. Actually they could have told me the truth for I wouldn't have been keen on going even if they had asked me. I'm not a bit frightened. Even if fighting breaks out here, my burial costume has been ready a long time." She saw in her mind's eye the beautiful embroidered burial shoes presented to her by her niece and felt sure these would make the King of Hell treat her with respect when she went to the nether world. This reflection gave her a subtle pleasure which kept her mind off the question of where her master and mistress were.

Mr. Pan went to see the correspondent who was a member of the Bureau of Education to ask whether the director really intended the schools to start as usual. "But certainly," the man answered. "He also said some teachers were so busy getting themselves out of harm's way they quite neglected their duty. It just showed they were unworthy to work in the field of education and this was a good chance to eliminate some of them." This announcement made Mr. Pan sit up to take notice. At once he congratulated himself on his wisdom in coming back from Shanghai. He made straight for the school, picked up a writing brush and drafted a circular to the parents of the students. War and fighting might be worrisome, he stated, but the education of young people was like food and clothing which could not be dispensed with for a single day. Now that the summer holidays were over, the school would start as usual. In the time of the great war in Europe, a net was spread in the air to prevent bombing so that teaching might continue uninterrupted. This kind of heroism, the notice went on, should not go unrivalled. It was to be hoped that the parents would understand, and in this spirit would send their children to school as if nothing had happened. All this was in the interest of both the school and the students and also for the honour of the town and the country.

After reading the draft three times, he was finally satisfied that there was nothing more he could add. When the director of education saw this circular the least to be expected was the remark, "He thinks like me." In a mood of complacency, Mr. Pan cut the stencil himself and mimeographed more than a hundred copies which he dispatched through the school janitor. Now that he had done his duty by his work he let his mind return to his private affairs. Since the school must start, he could hardly go to Shanghai again. But his wife and children would have a hard time all by themselves in the hotel. There was nothing he could do about that, he must just tell them to be careful and remain there without worrying. He used what ink there was left after drafting his circular to write a letter to his wife.

The next day in the tea-house he got authentic news that the railway was cut. His heart sank. Somehow, his beloved wife and two sons seemed to have drifted away on the wind to a

distant land, out of his reach. In a sad state of mind, he strolled to the school where the janitor reported on his mission the day before. "When I took the circular around I found more than twenty households with doors tightly locked and no one round to answer my knocking. I had to slip the circular in through a slit in the door. About thirty households had only servants at home; the masters had run away to Shanghai taking their children with them, of course. No one knew when they'd be back for school. The rest all took the circular but a few said since they were not sure how long they'd be alive the question of schooling had better wait for the time being."

"I see," said Mr. Pan, his mind not on these matters at all but troubled by gloomier thoughts. After a cigarette, he reached a decision. He went to the branch office of the Red Cross Society.

He proclaimed himself willing to become a member of the Red Cross and paid his fees. He said his school had fairly spacious premises and he wanted the Red Cross to use it as a home for women refugees in case of emergency. Such a charitable offer was of course warmly accepted. Besides, Mr. Pan was a well-known and respected figure in the town. The branch office gave him a Red Cross banner to be hoisted up at the school entrance and a Red Cross badge to show that he was a member of that organization.

Mr. Pan held the flag and badge in his hands as if they were a talisman, a guarantee of life and security. A mysterious sense of satisfaction stole into his heart. "Everything is safe now. But. . . ." He turned back to the man in the branch office with a smile. "Give me an extra banner and a few more badges, will you?" His reason was that the school had a back door and the badge was so small he might easily lose it so it was better to have a few to spare.

"This isn't something you can eat," said the Red Cross man jokingly, "and you can hardly use it as a plaything! Even if you take more than one badge, you're still only a member, so why ask for more than one?" But in the end he gave Mr. Pan a few spare ones to make him happy.

Both Red Cross banners were soon fluttering in the light breeze of early autumn but neither of them was near the school's

back entrance. The second banner had been placed over Mr. Pan's own door. One Red Cross badge glittered with the solemn light of charity on Mr. Pan's lapel, giving its wearer a new kind of courage. As for the rest, these were kept with care, wrapped in paper, in the pocket of Mr. Pan's shirt. "One is for her," he thought, "one is for Ah-ta and the other for the little one." Although they were still in distant Shanghai, out of his reach, the badges were a sort of double insurance for their safety which should give them a new courage too.

3

The two armies opened fire at Pichuang.

Very few households in Janli kept their doors open; the shops naturally all remained closed. Soldiers marched past in the streets frequently. They would soon be going to the front and felt that they were endowed with the highest authority; nothing was of any account in their eyes. They could trample whatever they liked underfoot. This was how the press-gang started. To prevent those forced into the army from running away, the conscripts were bound and marched along in a line with soldiers escorting them. Thus it came about that people were afraid of going out on the streets. When it was absolutely necessary to leave their houses, they went by small paths and byways. Even people, like Mr. Pan, who were armed with Red Cross badges, were rather wary and dared not strut about openly. The streets of Janli seemed quiet and very desolate.

For several days now, the Shanghai papers had not come. The local army headquarters, however, sometimes posted battle news which usually said that the enemy had been routed and our troops had advanced several *li*. When a fresh bulletin appeared on the street corner, a small group would gather slowly to read it carefully. They were not altogether convinced by what they read for they felt there were many things unsaid. They would disperse with a feeling of foreboding, their brows still tightly knit.

Mr. Pan had been downcast for the last few days. He worried most about his absent wife and children of whom he had no news. It seemed he might never be able to get in touch

with them again. And then there was the question of his own safety. "It's only a march of a hundred *li* or so from Pichuang. Although the Red Cross badge may serve some purpose, nobody ever wrote me a guarantee, so who can I ask for compensation if it turns out to be useless after all? Bullets, shells, robbers and fire are no laughing matter. I'll have to make more inquiries and find some other means to ensure my safety." So he asked here and there for news about the front and was sure there was a grain of truth in whatever news he got that was different from the current rumour. He then calculated its effect on his own interest. The sight of anyone rushing along the street with a look of panic would startle him for he was sure the man had learned some reliable but fearful news. Only the fact the man was a complete stranger prevented Mr. Pan from accosting and questioning him.

The Red Cross sent people to the front to look after the wounded; some of them came back frequently in army transports. The Red Cross was naturally the most reliable source of news. Although Mr. Pan belonged to the Red Cross he did not often go there for news for he was ashamed to admit his fear in public. Nevertheless, the Red Cross was a source of reliable information and it would be foolish to ask for news elsewhere. The result was Mr. Pan went at dusk every day to the house of Wu, a man who worked in the Red Cross office. Wu would tell him there was no news or that this side was doing all right at the front, after which Mr. Pan would go home with a sigh of relief.

One evening Mr. Pan went again to Wu's house. He had to wait a long time before Wu came back.

"Nothing new, eh?" asked Mr. Pan eagerly. "According to the bulletin, we launched a general offensive yesterday."

"Bad," said Wu looking worried and toying with his moustache.

"What?!" Mr. Pan's heart skipped a beat and he felt trapped.

As if afraid of being overheard, Wu answered in a low voice, "The reliable news is that Chengan, a town eight *li* from Pichuang, fell to the other side this morning."

Mr. Pan uttered one desperate cry, paused for a second or so and turned to leave, muttering as he went, "I'm going."

The street lamps seemed particularly dim that evening. Mr. Pan felt as if he were being chased from behind. Frightened and worried, he stumbled home as quickly as he could and told the maid, "You lock the doors and go to sleep. I'll be busy tonight and will not come back for the night." He saw there was an old padded silk gown in the wardrobe; they had forgotten to pack it in the suitcases which had been deposited for safe-keeping. It would be a pity to lose it. There were also a few of the boys' lined cotton tunics. A close scrutiny showed that they were still wearable. There was also an old silk skirt which his wife would probably be loath to part with. He tied them all together and went out with his bundle.

"Rickshaw! The red building in Fuhsin Lane. Ten cents."

"Whoever heard of ten cents?" drawled the rickshaw man. "How many rickshaws are out these days! Who would be out here risking his life for a few cents unless he needed them to keep alive? Thirty cents. Take it or leave it."

"Thirty cents then." Mr. Pan hurried over and stepped into the rickshaw. "But you must also do as I ask, go faster."

"Hey, Mr. Pan, where are you going?" a colleague by the name of Huang saw him and called out.

"Uh, Mr . . . over there. . . ." Mr. Pan in his panic was not quite sure who had spoken to him. Suddenly he realized it would be a waste of breath to answer for the rickshaw was going too fast to allow the other to chase after him to demand an answer. He swallowed the rest of his words.

The red building was full of people most of whom had moved in ten days ago. Children cried and people talked, lights were lit in many rooms so that there was even an atmosphere of cheer and bustle. "There is no vacant room here," his host told Mr. Pan. "But since all your things are here I can hardly turn you away. Just now, several others arrived unexpectedly too, and as I could not refuse them I've put them in a side room ordinarily used as a kitchen. I'll go and see if they couldn't take in one more."

"Oh, yes, surely they can take in one more." Mr. Pan felt comforted. "Besides, at a time like this, I don't intend to sleep through the night; a place to sit would be just fine."

When he stepped into the side room, his bundle on one arm, he thought at first that all this fear and panic were giving him hallucinations. He closed his eyes and opened them again but what he saw did not change. There, sitting by the window with a thick moustache twitching over his upper lip as he talked to someone opposite him, was no other than the director of the Bureau of Education.

Mr. Pan hesitated, the foot that had stepped over the threshold wavered; he meant to withdraw but thought better of it. The director had seen him too. "Ah, Mr. Pan, there you are," said he, smiling to cover his embarrassment. "Come in and sit down." When the host realized that they were acquainted he withdrew to attend to his own business.

"So you're here too, director. Can you accommodate one more in this room?"

"There's only the three of us here, of course we can. We brought along a mat so we could take turns lying down a bit. Good thing it's not too cold yet."

Mr. Pan felt that the director was extremely affable that night, not at all his usual stern and dignified self. Forgetting his restraint, he strode in. "Then allow me to come in and keep you three company for the night."

The room was far from spacious. A middle-aged man with glasses sat on a mat spread on the floor. There was a look of fatigue on his face but he showed no inclination for sleep. The stove and pots and pans were placed against one wall. Near the window stood three chairs in a row; the director occupied one, the director's cousin, a young man in his twenties with sleek hair, another, the third one was empty. In one corner were an osier suitcase and three bundles—probably the three men's luggage. The few things were enough to clutter up the room, there was hardly any vacant space left. The coat of dust on the electric bulb made everything in the room hazy.

Mr. Pan put his bundle down with those of the others. He took the vacant seat with an air of apology. After the director had introduced him to his companions, he asked, "Have you also heard the news about Chengan?"

"Yes. With Chengan lost, Pichuang is in great danger."

"Our side must have been careless along the southern route, the loss of Chengan is a sign of this. It's the easiest thing for the other side to steal up to Pichuang from Chengan. At this very moment they may have got in. If so, I dare not think what will happen here!"

"If so, chaos will reign."

"But Commander Tu on this side isn't a fool you know, he's noted for strategy. He's probably foreseen all this and has plans to forestall the other side. Maybe he'll turn the tables at this juncture and take up the offensive, attacking the enemy in its lair."

"If that happens there'll be an end to hostilities and that'll be great. We, in the field of education, can then start school and carry on as usual."

The director promptly became conscious of his dignity at the mention of the word "education." Twisting his thick moustache, he said with a sigh, "This fighting has certainly caused a loss to students of different ages, to say nothing of other people." He forgot his cramped and uncomfortable position in the tiny room and felt as if he were back again in the dignified office of the Bureau of Education.

"Commander Chu of the other side is really hateful," said the middle-aged man on the mat with some indignation. "Why must he resist when this side attacked? He's bound to be defeated. If he'd been smart and offered no resistance, all this fighting would not have occurred."

"He's a fool," the director's cousin agreed. "He won't give up till the end. And in the meanwhile we have to suffer cooped up in this small, dark room!" His tone was not serious.

Mr. Pan's thoughts went to his wife and children in Shanghai. He wondered if they were all right, if they had kept out of trouble. Were they asleep at this moment? Since he could not feel them near him and his imagination conjured up only a very hazy picture, he felt that the fighting had injured him more than any of the others. He let his eyes rest mournfully on the little courtyard outside the window and stayed silent.

But then his thoughts turned to the terrible news he had heard from Wu and the threat of danger to follow. "I wonder what is really happening!" he exclaimed.

"Hard to say!" The director spoke knowingly. "In war, everything depends on making use of the right moment. The tide may turn any time and things may not happen as we thought. Perhaps at this very moment . . . we. . . ." He smiled at the middle-aged man.

All the others in the room, the man on the mat, the director's cousin and Mr. Pan caught the significance of his smile. Assured that they were safe enough where they were, they also smiled with satisfaction.

The little yard overgrown with weeds provided a comfortable haven for mosquitoes and small insects of all descriptions. The lamp in the room drew the insects in swarms and the four frightened men had a bad time of it. Midgets attacked their faces; a sudden sting from a particularly venomous mosquito kept making one or the other jump. From time to time they stopped talking to listen with trepidation for the sound of shooting or the clamour of frightened people. Sleep was out of the question, of course. They merely took turns lying down a bit as the director had predicted.

Mr. Pan's eyes were bloodshot the next morning and he shivered with cold. Longing to know how things were outside he slipped out all alone. The streets looked the same as on ordinary mornings. A few stray dogs, tails up, sniffed cheerily here and there. A man with drowsy eyes walked past now and then. Mr. Pan turned a corner, still he neither saw nor heard anything unusual. He could hardly suppress a smile at the recollection of his own panic the night before, but on second thought he felt there was really nothing funny about it. Better, after all, to be over-cautious rather than take unnecessary risks.

Three weeks or so later, the fighting came to an end. People wagged their heads and assured each other, "Now, things'll be all right. As long as there's no fighting, we'll be safe." Mr. Pan, though, was not quite happy for the trains were still not running and he could not fetch his wife and children back from Shanghai. There had been two letters, both very brief, which, instead of making him feel better, only made him miss them more. He was annoyed with himself for being such a poor prophet. He could

very well have saved all that extra expense of taking his family away to Shanghai, and then he need not have led this lonely bachelor's life for several weeks.

Realizing that the Bureau of Education would soon be considering the question of starting school, he went there for news. As soon as he stepped into the reception room he noticed several clerks busy cutting up large strips of paper and grinding fresh ink. It looked as if they were getting ready for some festivity.

"Here's Mr. Pan, just the man we want," cried one. "You write beautifully in the Yen style. This is just the job for you."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Pan is the only one who can do calligraphy of this size well," chimed in the rest.

"Write what? I'm completely at sea about what's going on."

"We are getting ready to welcome the triumphant return of Commander Tu. Four festooned archways are to be erected at the railway station to welcome Commander Tu's train. We need to write inscriptions for the four archways."

"Who am I to write for such an important event?"

"We all agree you're the best man!" "You mustn't be modest," came the cry from all sides as a writing brush was thrust into Mr. Pan's hands.

Mr. Pan was quite overwhelmed. He took the writing brush and dipped it in the ink. After a pensive silence, he wrote, "His Deeds Surpass All Others" and on the second strip of paper, "His Might Sweeps the Southeast." On the third piece of paper he wrote, "Virtue and Benevolence So Bountiful." But as his brush formed the word "bountiful," he had a vision of press-gangs, exploding shells, houses in flame, raped women, pale-faced refugees and rotting corpses.

"This epithet shows the people's heartfelt gratitude!" cried one of the men watching, with a sigh of admiration. "The writing is more beautiful too."

"I wonder what he'll find to match this epithet," commented another man.

November 27, 1924

Translated by Tang Sheng

Night

In a lane not too clean and neat there was a two-storey house with one room downstairs and one upstairs. All the furniture in the downstairs room was in a blur as if the dim yellowish paraffin lamp on the table had darkened the room instead of giving it light. Beside the table sat an elderly woman with a child about two in her arms. There was nothing unusual about the woman's features. Though her forehead was wrinkled, she did not look old or feeble. Only her reddened eyes were a little strange, staring fixedly from their deep sockets at the child's face. She looked sad and lost, noting how the colour had faded from the little boy's cheeks and how weak he was after his recent shock.

Of late the child had cried as much as six months ago when he was being weaned. He would burst out crying abruptly just as if someone had hit him. Once he started he would go on endlessly, like cicadas chirping in summer. The woman tried her best to soothe him, recalling all the phrases she had used to comfort babies in her younger days, but all to little avail; perhaps the child found them too outlandish or old-fashioned. Only after he had exhausted himself by sobbing would his eyelids begin to flutter until finally they closed altogether.

Tonight the woman felt relieved because, for a change, the child had not started crying. If he should go to sleep like that, wouldn't it be a rare quiet night? But on the other hand, she was wondering uneasily what news her younger brother would bring back, what he had learned of her poor darling who had been in her thoughts day and night.

These evenings had been torture to her, apart from the child's crying, for she seemed to see so many shadowy pictures in the dim lamplight. First here, now there, she could have sworn she glimpsed pools of bright red blood! As cars sped by or heavy trucks thundered steadily past outside, she seemed to see the two of them in a car with heavy clanking chains on their wrists and ankles. When footsteps — heavy or light, slow or quick — passed by her door, she was afraid the police had come for her and the baby. The ringing of her neighbour's doorbell set her heart

throbbing. Already of the age when one sleeps little, she could not fall asleep at all now for terror. When she went to bed she dared not light the lamp for fear the light upstairs would attract attention and cause trouble. Besides, she preferred to see nothing, to be in sheer darkness. But no! The flickering shadows appeared just the same: the red pool like the setting sun even seemed to be spreading. All she could do was to hug the child who often sobbed in his dreams. . . .

She kept gazing at the child. Weak and stricken, she did not know which way to turn. The future loomed before her like a sea of mist which surely hid wild beasts or pitfalls. And her only companion in danger was this small child. She was virtually alone. She dreaded to think more and, wanting something better to do, she asked the child, "Big Baby, precious, what's your surname?"

"Chang," he replied. Not knowing what a surname means, a child simply repeats what he is told just as he is taught to say papa and mama.

"No, no," the woman scolded him mildly, a little worried because he had not learned his new lesson well. "Don't say that, nobody's surname is Chang. Listen, Big Baby's surname is Sun. Remember, Sun, Sun. . . ."

"Sun," the child did not insist but repeated after her in his babyish tone, looking up into her face.

She shut her eyes tightly twice. Her tears had nearly run dry but she felt close to sobbing. "That's right. Sun, Sun. Now again, what is your surname?"

"Sun," repeated the little boy mischievously, reaching out for the green jade hairpin in her hair.

"Good, Big Baby's a dear!" She held the child tightly, her face brushing against his cotton shirt. "Whoever asks you, your surname is Sun, Sun. . . ." Her voice, tinged with sadness, died away.

The child, his arms pinioned, was unable to reach the hairpin. Suddenly he burst out crying, struggling with all his might, tears streaming down his face.

She knew what this meant—the normal routine had started, no chance of a quiet evening! In a very gentle voice she crooned, "Big Baby, precious, don't cry! . . . A nice doll's

coming to see Big Baby. . . . She's in a red sedan-chair . . . in a pretty carriage. . . ."

The little boy as usual paid no heed but cried even louder, "I want . . . my mam. . . ."

More distressed and frightened than ever, the woman felt his cries were piercing her heart like sharp needles and worried lest the neighbours hear through the thin walls and become suspicious. But it was not easy to appease him. Fully aware that what she was saying was no use, still she repeated again and again in a trembling voice, "Mama will be back soon." At that the child only cried louder, opening wide his tearful eyes and looking around for his mother.

She stood up and started pacing the floor, holding the child in her arms. Her slow, heavy steps showed her age. She paced to and fro, reciting those outlandish, old-fashioned expressions meant to soothe a child. The furniture in the room seemed to be vibrating with the child's crying, the wick of the lamp seemed to be expanding, expanding . . . and ah, a pool of blood! She shut her weary eyes, not daring to look again. Although the child's cries were piercing her ears, she felt she was alone on a strange mountain; in surroundings so weird that her blood was turning cold.

Tap, tap, somebody was knocking at the door. At the same time the scabby brown dog across the lane started barking. She started, then recognized the familiar knock. Her younger brother had come back. She hurried to open the door.

The door had barely opened a crack when in slipped the man outside. Swiftly and softly he turned back to close the door as if shutting out something that was after him.

"Well?" asked the woman eagerly in a low voice. She wished she could see into his heart, to share all he knew.

Her brother walked in, glancing around and taking a seat, gasping. He looked like a merchant of about forty, fine wrinkles around his narrow eyes making it seem as if he were always smiling. His nose was not big either. Sweat glimmered on his forehead, yet he was shivering. The child's crying reminded him of a few water-chestnuts he had in his pocket. He took them out and handed them to the child, saying, "Eat these! Don't cry!"

Tired already and attracted by the water-chestnuts, the child took them and fell to nibbling them between sobs. Only then did the woman sit down again by the table.

"Well, I saw what I went for," said her brother faintly. Hand on forehead, he looked crestfallen and exhausted.

"You did?" The woman's eyes were dilated, her heart racked by a feeling stronger than grief.

"Yes, just now."

Only fear prevented the woman from dragging him out to show her. She uttered a cry of despair.

"Sister, nowadays there is hardly a good-hearted person to be found. But the fellow I met today, he is a good sort." Her brother stuck up one thumb in admiration.

"The one you went to look for?"

"That's right. I found him, at a small tea-house. I approached him in a friendly way, saying there were these two people he probably remembered. Now they were finished, but I begged him to have a heart and show me their coffins." He knitted his brows, making the wrinkles around his eyes more conspicuous, scratched his head and pursed his lips to show that it had not been easy. "At first he paid little attention to me, just told me to forget it. So many people were finished, male and female, in long gowns or in short coats, how could he remember any two of them? Anyway, it was forbidden to see the coffins, he said. But as I had found the fellow, I would not give up. I tried again, telling him how sad their case was, a husband and wife, the woman leaving an old mother and a baby crying for mama day in and day out in its grandmother's arms. . . . I begged him to take pity on the old and the young. . . . In fact, I did everything I could short of kowtowing to him."

The woman listened, sadly casting down her eyes to watch the child who was falling asleep. The water-chestnuts had dropped on to her lap.

"My pleading moved him," her brother continued in a proud tone, a genuine smile appearing for one brief instant on his seemingly eternally smiling face. "After all, everybody is human. Appeal to someone as a fellow man and he's bound to be touched. He stopped holding aloof, thought for a while and sighed, 'There was a couple like that. Naturally, everyone is dear to his parents.

Since you made it out such a sad case, I'll show you the place. But why should a young married couple do such things instead of leading a quiet life?' I told him I didn't know. We merchants couldn't understand those scholars. Probably. . . ."

The woman heaved a sigh from the depth of her aching heart. Like her brother, she did not know the mind of her daughter and son-in-law either. But of one thing she was certain: they did not belong to the same category as those prisoners with ferocious looks and rough voices. Not the same category, yet the same fate, why? Recently she had been pondering this painful problem but she could not solve it. Nobody was there to give her an answer either.

"He told me to meet him at six o'clock at a street corner. I of course thanked him again and again and went to the appointed place ahead of time to wait for him. After six he turned up, in ordinary civilian clothes. He led me to the fields, talking to me as we walked. Ah. . . ."

He stopped, afraid of what came next. The fearful, ugly recollections refused to be brushed aside. But could his sister bear to hear? Perhaps she would faint. . . . The two of them had walked towards the open country. . . . There was no street light, no moon and no stars in the sky, the oppressive darkness weighed heavily upon them. The black shadows of distant trees and nearby buildings in the deathly silence seemed like monsters forming ranks. Occasionally two or three fire-flies floated up and down as if ghosts were blinking their eyes with joy as they danced! The dogs' barking and the automobiles' honking in the distance sounded as if they came from beyond the horizon. But the faint droning in the air emanated from scores of small ephemeral insects. It had rained in the morning and the ground was muddy and slippery. He stumbled along in the dark. The other, a cigarette between his lips, said slowly, "They seemed kindly folk. They came to this place full of indignation yet they still looked kindly. Each eyed the other, then both lowered their heads, as if they wanted to say something yet could not. You know, that is the type we are afraid of. We don't mind fighting, we can raise our guns and open fire. I suppose you could, too, provided you were strong enough to carry a gun. Before you is the enemy, whether you hit him or not, you don't know what he

looks like. But if someone is bound and placed before you so that you see even his hair and eyebrows clearly, then it is hard to pull the trigger! After all, he's a human being. It's especially hard with those kindly ones, who look delicate enough to fall at a breath. That day the one given the job backed away several times and then — orders are orders! — tightly knitting his brows he fired. For some reason he missed. The man was hit in the arm and he writhed in pain. The woman, seeing that, screamed like mad. To tell you frankly, I felt so bad that I turned away. Three more shots and the thing was finished. The two of them were covered with blood." As he listened, holding his breath, his legs grew numb and he hardly dared move for fear he might tread on a skeleton. So he followed closely, his chest almost brushing against the other man's back.

The woman saw that her brother was in a sort of trance, his small eyes bulging, scratching his head. She knew there must be something more. "What did he say?" she asked. "Did he see the end?"

The "end" was something which had been on her mind for days and nights. But she could not picture it to herself. Guns she had seen on the shoulders of soldiers and policemen. Was that dark glistening tube the thing which had finished her daughter and son-in-law? No, she could not believe it! She could see the young couple as clearly as in life. In what way did they deserve to be shot? She could not understand. How did the blood flow from their bodies? How did their breath cease and vanish into thin air? There was something so dreamlike and unreal about this that she sometimes felt her daughter and son-in-law had not been "done for." One day the door would open to their familiar knock and the dear young pair would come in, full of life, shoulder to shoulder. But this feeling was equally dreamlike and unreal.

"He didn't see the end," her brother hastened to reply. "He said the man was very generous, giving away his clothes. That's how he got the pair of foreign-style trousers he had on."

"A light grey pair, made last August," murmured the woman, gazing at the lamplight, screwing up her eyes.

"I couldn't see clearly because it was dark and the ground was slippery. Several times I nearly fell. If I hadn't been wearing

shoes with leather soles, my feet would have been soaked. We came to a spot and he said that was the place. I looked around. There were a dozen or so big dark trees under which were some dead white coffins." The brother lowered his head, and his bald spot glimmered in the lamplight. He had not the heart to tell her his sensation when he was told to look for coffins "numbers 17 and 18." Words would fail him to describe it. He had felt that all kinds of corpses — some frowning or gritting their teeth, some with shoulders or breasts shot through, some with broken noses or limbs — were about to kick off the coffin lids and dash at him. He was almost paralysed with horror. His guide struck several matches and said, "Look here, 17 and 18." The white coffin lids showed dimly in the match light. At first they looked like creeping snakes, but when he could fix his eyes on them, they stopped moving and he saw the two Arabic numbers, 17 and 18, written with a Chinese brush. "I've come to see you, niece!" he invoked her under his breath, praying that she would not follow him. Then he quickly fled back to the path. But this was not suitable for his sister's ears. He continued, "That fellow said the numbers were written on the coffins, and he remembered clearly their numbers were 17 and 18. We searched through the coffins one by one till we found them, one straight and one lying crosswise, I recognized the numbers on the coffins."

"Seventeen! Eighteen!" cried the woman in spite of herself, pale in anguish, her eyes shining with tears. Just as on that night when someone had slipped in to break the awful news, she felt aghast, stunned and cold, her mind a blank, with a strange sinking sensation. No more would she hear their familiar knock or see the dear young pair come in, full of life, shoulder to shoulder. They were gone beyond recall. Numbers 17 and 18 — there was evidence solid as iron! Hatred blazed from her empty heart, a fierce glint came into her eyes. "I could kill them!"

Seeing his sister in such a state, the brother turned away listlessly and said with a sigh, "I saw that the coffins were passable, not too thin." Obviously just a well-intentioned lie. All of a sudden, for no reason at all, he was gripped by a wild suspicion: What if that man had remembered the wrong num-

bers? It was not likely. Still the suspicion kept gnawing at his heart like a poisonous serpent.

"Listen!" the woman told him, gritting her teeth and trembling violently. The sleeping baby stretched as if he were waking up but simply turned over. Smoothing his cotton shirt, she continued, "I'm past caring! I don't mind whether I die tomorrow or this instant. I'm so old and my fate is hard." She went on between sobs, "The year that your brother-in-law died your niece was only five. Bringing her up wasn't easy for me, a poor widow all on my own. When she married a handsome, educated man, I was happy. I was happy when she gave birth to a son, a lively lovable boy." Her right hand unconsciously caressed the child's head. "The two were both teachers, doing their jobs gladly, loving and respecting each other. So much the better: that made me all the happier. But now what's become of them—17 and 18! It's as if the sky had fallen suddenly, it's terrifying! What did they do? They were my daughter and son-in-law. I have a right to know. But I was told not to ask. Even you, you told me not to ask, saying that asking would bode no good. . . . What was there to be afraid of? I was Yingchuan's mother, Chang was my son-in-law. I'll shout through the streets and see who dares do anything to me!" Her whole being burning with anger, she had raised her voice by the end in passionate protest for no longer was she afraid. Patting the child's back, she cried, "Who says your name is Sun? Our Big Baby's surname is Chang, Chang! If only I could kill those fiends, to take revenge for my young daughter and son-in-law!"

Dazed and frightened by this outburst, her brother strained his ears to hear if there was any sound outside. Then he muttered feebly, "Why, why, what does it matter to say his surname is Sun? Ah, there's something I forgot." He fumbled in his pocket, remembering the piece of crumpled paper the man had handed to him in the dark on the road, saying that he had been asked to deliver it to the young couple's family, but he had slipped it in the pocket of the trousers and nearly forgotten it. As if it were something monstrous, the brother hesitated at first to accept. But he had to let it be put in his palm and, loosely crumpling it, he thrust it into his pocket like a thief, feeling more alarmed than ever.

"They've left a note!" he said, copper coins tinkling in his pocket.

"Ah, a note!" The woman straightened up in high tension. Expectation fervent as is felt by a woman running to open the door for her beloved took possession of her for a moment.

Though it was less than ten days since she was cut off from her daughter and son-in-law, she felt she had not seen their smiles or heard their voices for years. Now this note would tell her everything about them, answer all her questions, and link her heart to theirs. Naturally it meant the whole world to her in that instant.

The note was produced. It was a torn cigarette packet with several finger-prints and a burnt spot on it. On the inner side was scrawled a message in pencil.

Screwing up his small eyes and holding the note near the paraffin lamp, the brother read aloud, "'We are dying with no regret. Don't grieve over us.' What strange talk! Dying with no regret! 'Please take good care of Big Baby, we shall live in him!' Well, they want you to take good care of Big Baby, because he's them; if Big Baby is all right, it is as good as if they were alive themselves. But this business of 'no regret' is really queer, queer!"

"Let me see it!" The woman snatched the note and fixed her eyes on it like an intent reader ready to devour a favourite book although actually she was illiterate.

It was very still in the room. The child's deep breathing was hardly audible.

Though illiterate, the woman understood that note. Not just the words, but the meaning hidden inside. For the first time she saw into the mind of her daughter and son-in-law. A new strength flowed through her whole being and her heart felt lighter. The furniture in the lamplight looked as quiet as usual. Outside she could hear nothing except distant singing accompanied by a fiddle played by an adept hand.

"Big Baby, my darling, go upstairs and sleep." She stood up and made for the stairs, her lips touching the little boy's head, the note pressed against his breast. Her tired eyes were glowing with maternal love, her steps were lighter than before. She had

courageously made up her mind to take up a mother's responsibilities once again.

The child, joggled awake, without opening his eyes screwed up his little face and cried, "Mam. . ."

November 4, 1927

Translated by Chang Su

A Declaration

The school principal received a telegram. As his habit was, he looked first at the end where he saw "Education Bureau" and the date. Next, his eyes flashed to the beginning of the telegram and travelled slowly over the mimeographed blue characters. Ah, it was nothing serious. He breathed more freely.

The telegram merely instructed him to find out and report back immediately who had drafted the declaration issued recently by some teachers in his school.

"I saw the declaration in the papers, but I don't know who wrote it," thought the principal. "I must be the only one kept in the dark. More than fifty teachers from different schools signed the declaration. All twenty or so of my staff, except for the civics teacher, put down their names. Yet no one mentioned anything to me. They behaved as if nothing had happened even when it was published in the papers. I remarked, 'So you've made a declaration.' Mr. Chang, sitting opposite me, answered with his eyes on the wall, 'Yes, we've made a declaration. We are so fed up with this mess that we had to say something to make ourselves feel better.' The others went on reading their text-books and making notes as if they had heard nothing. Two hurried away pretending to have remembered something. In a

word, they didn't want to discuss it with me. I'm not a fool, I can see clearly. Why should I insist on talking about it?"

But the telegram in his hands said the Education Bureau was waiting for a reply. He must have a talk with his staff. He could find out by other means, of course, but that would take longer, and making inquiries among the teachers of other schools would be more awkward than among his own. There were more than twenty of them. Whom should he ask? Not those tiresome fellows who had pretended not to hear him. Perhaps Mr. Chang would do. Although he kept his eyes on the wall he had at least answered him. All the principal wanted from him was the name of the man who had drafted the declaration. He would report this to the Education Bureau. Then his task would be done.

So Mr. Chang the drawing master was summoned to the principal's office and asked to sit down. "I want to know who drafted your declaration. Can you tell me?" This was a simple enough question.

"It was Mr. Wang Yung-yi," Mr. Chang answered without hesitation.

"Mr. Wang? You don't say!" His task was not so very simple, it seemed. The principal felt as if an invisible noose was falling over his head.

"Though he drafted it, the content was decided by us all," explained Mr. Chang, running his fingers through his long hair. "We had a meeting to discuss it. Different people raised different points. After talking them over we put our ideas together. Somebody suggested, 'Let Mr. Wang Yung-yi do the writing. He is the language teacher. He writes well.' Mr. Wang did not refuse and brought his draft to our next meeting."

Tap, tap, tap! Drumming on the desk, the principal gazed fixedly at a couplet written by Chang Ping-lin in the style of ancient inscriptions. "It doesn't look too good," he murmured, then checked himself. Regret showed on his face. After half a minute's consideration, his gaze fell on Mr. Chang. "The Education Bureau has sent a telegram asking me to find out who made the draft," he said softly.

"Find out who made the draft? What does that mean?"

"Who knows? But I can assure you that they are not going to ask him to be their secretary general because they like the style of the declaration! Mr. Wang ought not to have done it. There are language teachers in the other schools too. Why should an old man like him look for trouble?"

"But there was nothing wrong in making the draft."

The principal looked at the drawing master who had been a student himself not long ago and sighed. "You are too naive, Mr. Chang! You would think differently if you had been a teacher longer. You say there is nothing wrong? This investigation proves there is something wrong—how serious, we don't know. Even if it is only a little thing, how annoying to have this happen in our school!"

"Is that so?" Bewildered as well as indignant, the drawing master was lost for words.

"Well, I have to report the truth. But I will warn Mr. Wang," said the principal to himself. He rang for the usher and told him to invite Mr. Wang over.

Mr. Wang arrived and sat down, tugging at his beard as usual. His threadbare, shiny cuffs were stained with red ink. He flushed and showed a trace of agitation when he heard what the principal had to say, but he replied calmly, "Yes, I made the draft. You can report it to the Education Bureau. There is nothing outrageous in a declaration which merely expressed our wish to maintain our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Every Chinese, every right-minded Chinese, must cherish the same thoughts day and night."

"A few days ago, the professors from more than twenty universities in Peking issued a simple straightforward declaration, quite similar to ours," put in Mr. Chang. "That is to say, we all feel the same."

"It may not be appropriate for middle-school teachers to say what the professors say. You ought. . . ." Thinking better of it, the principal changed the subject. "Since you drew up the draft, Mr. Wang, I cannot but report the truth. It is good to find you so understanding. But by way of extenuation we might add that you simply recorded the consensus of opinion." This was said in a tone of concern, while the principal peered

sympathetically through his large glasses at the somewhat uneasy face of Mr. Wang, as if he were a small boy who had misbehaved.

"All right," said Mr. Wang, and withdrew with Mr. Chang from the principal's office.

That same evening, after telegraphing his reply the principal received another telegram instructing him to send express to the bureau the composition books of the two forms Mr. Wang taught. "Just as I feared!" He shuddered, as if a noose were tightening round his neck. This was not an ordinary check-up of the work. It presaged calamity. If this calamity, like a shower of meteors, fell not on one individual but on the whole school, the result would not bear contemplating! The night was chilly and he turned icy cold as if he had changed suddenly into thin clothes.

Mr. Wang collected the composition books from his pupils. The principal suggested that they work all night on them.

"Do you mean we should go through all these exercise books? I don't think it's necessary," said Mr. Wang who was quite sure of himself. "I've confidence in my corrections—they're carefully done."

"It's not that, Mr. Wang. Just think how serious it would be, especially for you, if there were anything wrong with these compositions!"

"Anything wrong?" Mr. Wang laughed. "I assure you I am most careful and our boys have always been taught to behave themselves. How could 'anything wrong' crawl like worms into these exercise books?"

"Discretion is always necessary. We must be discreet in everything." The principal felt not a little embarrassed, but he was determined to carry out his plan. "As the principal, I ask you to have some consideration for our school and look over these exercise books with me," he insisted.

There was no escape for Mr. Wang. The two men sat up all night, not reaching the end of their laborious task till the early sparrows were cheeping on the eaves at the break of day. By then characters were reeling before their eyes like flies swarming round a garbage can or crows wheeling in the evening sky. Mr. Wang had read each composition first, then passed it on for the principal to check. Carefully, the principal chewed over

every phrase and sentence for a hidden meaning, not going on to the next expression until he was certain that this one was genuinely correct and loyal. The result of a whole night's work was the discovery that in writing an essay entitled *The Countryside in Autumn* seven boys had referred to peasants harvesting rice with "sickles." This struck the principal as improper, and he changed all seven sickles into knives.

"Nothing else wrong, is there?" said the principal, yawning and turning out the light.

Mr. Wang, tired out and thoroughly annoyed, reflected that one minute would have sufficed to change seven "sickles," instead of sitting up, shivering all night. "Not after you've read them, sir," he replied indifferently.

Rousing his secretary out of his warm bed, the principal told him to wrap up the composition books and send someone with them at once to the post office. They were to be dispatched express as soon as the post office opened.

News of the two telegrams soon spread among the teachers, who felt sickened by it, as if smeared with slime and unable to wash themselves clean. This was the chief topic of conversation in the staff room.

"They want to look at the compositions he corrected just because he made the draft. Any fool can see there's something wrong with the declaration."

"What's wrong with it? It says no more than you can find in the papers. Why shouldn't we say what educational circles elsewhere and the Peking students are saying?"

"Have you seen yesterday's newspaper? The Shanghai students have published a similar statement."

"That's just the point. How can the teachers take the part of the students? The Peking students are being arrested and beaten. Now that we have made a declaration we should expect to be investigated."

"You mean that teachers should take the opposite stand from the students?"

"Precisely! That's how it is today. If we don't take the opposite stand, how can we teach? If we want to keep our jobs we must join the opposition. . . . I am not pulling your leg. This is the truth, whether you like it or not."

"Then we ought not to have made any declaration?"

"That's another thing. We have a dual personality, being Chinese as well as teachers. As Chinese we must speak, be there listeners or not. But a teacher, like a soldier, must obey orders. No freedom of speech for us! Has anyone ever seen a declaration issued by a platoon of soldiers in such-and-such a company?"

"All we did was sign our names. We didn't say we were teachers. That meant we were signing as Chinese."

"What if others classify us as teachers?"

"Then we're in for disciplinary action!"

Here the conversation stopped. The ticking of the clock was suddenly heard. Indefinable doubts and misgivings filled their minds.

"What if Mr. Wang is the only one penalized?" asked the drawing master Mr. Chang eagerly, looking at the faces around him.

"We'll stand up for him. He has done nothing wrong."

"He only put down what everyone agreed on. All of us should be responsible if we were in the wrong."

"Why should we say we were wrong?"

"Let's get everyone who signed to go in a body to the commissioner of education and tell him that all we did was to voice our love for our country. Are we not allowed to love our country? . . ."

Just then the principal's shadow, obliquely framed by the doorway, fell on to the floor. The ticking of the clock was heard once more.

Two days later the third telegram arrived from the Education Bureau. The principal opened it with trembling fingers. A long sigh of relief escaped him, the noose round his neck seemed to loosen.

The telegram read: Nothing improper was found in Wang Yung-yi's composition books. Dismiss him immediately. No reprimand.

The principal showed Mr. Wang the telegram to save himself the trouble of talking. With a sinking heart Mr. Wang saw in his mind's eye his homeless compatriots in the northeast, refugees suffering hunger and cold in the Yellow and Yangtse River Valleys, the unemployed in the big cities . . . and among these

scenes of desolation he glimpsed himself. Coming out of this daze, he quietly took his luggage and left the school without once turning his head. He took a rickshaw to the station which was crammed with passengers waiting for various trains. They were saying that no trains were likely to come because the Shanghai students were on strike. Yet still they waited. From time to time they went to the edge of the platform, braving the cutting wind, to look at the motionless signal. Mr. Wang joined these passengers and, tugging at his beard, waited disconsolately with them.

When news of Mr. Wang's departure reached the staff room, the disgust in each mind was tempered by the dubious speculation: "Suppose I'd been the one to draft that declaration!"

Translated by Yu Fan-chin

Apricot Orchard (coloured woodcut) ▶

by Chao Mei

Chao Mei, a young woodcut artist, was originally a member of a cultural troupe of the People's Liberation Army. In 1958, he took part in the reclamation of the Northern Wasteland in Heilungkiang, the theme of many of his vigorous woodcuts. *Apricot Orchard* is one of his recent works. *Chinese Literature* has published his *The Break* (No. 3, 1961), *Dusk* (No. 7, 1961) and *The Sun Rises over the Northern Prairie* (No. 12, 1961). He is at present an editor of the *Heilungkiang Pictorial*.







TUANMU HUNG-LIANG

Despoilers of the Crop

People claimed that in ancient times a herd of elephants had come through here, led by a large white bull elephant. Later a temple had been erected and named White Elephant Monastery. Of course it had long since fallen into ruin. Even white-haired oldsters living at the foot of the mountain had no recollection of it. But sometimes shepherds found bits of carved brick or tiles shaped like animal heads in the grass.

Because there were many wild beasts in the mountains, peasants in the upper part of White Elephant Village had planted sessile hemp on the edges of their fields to serve as fences; those in the lower part had set in cactus.

Old Chien, a resident of the upper village, was a famous hunter. Although in recent years his arthritis had kept him out of the mountains, he had been thinking for some time of organizing a hunters' detachment to deal with the animals that were coming down with increasing frequency and ruining much of the growing grain. The people's commune leaders had felt that it

would take too many men away from the field work, and so the detachment had not been formed. But this autumn, probably because no one had done anything about them for several years, the wild animals were particularly numerous, and they inflicted considerable damage, cleaning out an entire section of a corn field. Old Chien felt that the hunters' detachment could not be put off any longer.

One day, as Chien was standing at the door of his house, the talkative old Chi-fa came along. Chi-fa was more garrulous than ever.

"Forget it," he urged Old Chien. "Your bones and joints aren't what they used to be. When a tree ages it loses its bark, when a man ages his spine bends. You and I will never have straight backs again. If you get even one thrust from the tusks of a wild boar, you won't recover. It's no use trying to do the impossible. Besides, harvesting, ploughing, harrowing, transplanting new shoots, all need men. If after pulling a lot of able-bodied fellows off the job and putting hunting rifles on their shoulders you don't bag any animals although you search everywhere, you'll be heaped with such a load of gab it'll break your back."

"I've got a whole crateful of gab from you already," growled Old Chien. He didn't invite Chi-fa inside.

Chi-fa blew out a puff of pipe smoke. "Even the peacock must lose some feathers, the tiger must shed some fur," he intoned pontifically. "When your fields are near the mountain, you're bound to have a little spoilage by wild beasts."

"It's only because they haven't touched your private plot. That's what makes you talk so generously," Chien countered.

"Who says they haven't?" Chi-fa retorted. "You go look. A bear finished off every bit of corn in that patch beside my pond. It left great big tracks. Bears always come at night and leave before dawn. Who can stay up night after night, watching for them?"

Chien glared at him. "I can. And that's just what I'm going to do."

Chi-fa sighed. "Bones and joints, bones and joints. You're sixty this year. You won't be able to stand it. An old horse carries its head low. It's no match for the fleet young steed."

Old Chien laughed. "I'm going to nab a live bear just to show you."

Chi-fa blew another puff of smoke. "I believe you. All you have to do is grow twenty years younger. But this I do know — though it's still autumn, at night the cold seeps through the soles of your feet and climbs to the top of your head. Your whole body turns to ice. Bones and joints. Yours aren't even as good as mine. You'd better conserve your strength."

"You needn't sing that song in front of me," Chien said irritably. "Climb into your pipe bowl if you're so afraid of the winter cold."

As they were arguing, Pai Mao approached from the east end of the village. In high spirits, he was carrying two dangling yellow objects. Old Chien recognized them at once as weasels.

Chi-fa's sight was not so keen. "What have you got there?" he hailed. "I can't make head or tail of them."

"Hey, can't you see? Two big yellow weasels." Pai Mao raised them high. "Every household in the village is raising chicks and rabbits and they've been getting fat on them."

"You've done a wonderful thing," Chi-fa shouted. "My two lion bunnies were eaten by weasels. Cute and lively they were, and white as snow. It nearly broke my heart. I wasn't raising them to feed those two devils. What are you going to do with them? Take'em to market?"

"Oh, no," Pai Mao replied piously. "I'm turning them in. Two fine skins. A little token of my esteem."

"Good idea, I'll come with you. Are you giving them to the commune, or selling them to the state purchasing station?" Chi-fa followed after him.

"Giving them to the commune, of course," said Pai Mao. He glanced at Old Chien.

"Right, right, a man should always think of the public good." Chi-fa caught up with him.

Without a word, Chien turned and entered the house. He took a double-barrelled shotgun down from the wall and started polishing it.

The commune's production brigade gave Old Chien two young fellows. One, named Four Seasons, was a good bird catcher. The other, called Ah Chang, was an excellent fisherman. Both wanted to learn hunting from the old man. As a matter of fact there were quite a number of hunters in the brigade, but they all were used to the mountains; they knew nothing about bagging game in the corn fields. That was why the brigade assigned only the two young men. Together with Old Chien they made a total of three — not much of a team. Nevertheless they were given the full-sounding title of hunters' detachment.

Each carrying a brightly polished gun, they set out one night from Old Chien's house and built a camp fire at the edge of the fields. Four Seasons constructed a bamboo platform in the branches of a tall tree and climbed up from time to time to reconnoitre. Ah Chang brought his forked fishing spear, in case they ran into any moles or hedgehogs.

Gun in hand, Chien went off in search of tracks. He wanted to know which way the animals came and how they departed.

Four Seasons had already caught a partridge. He covered it with mud and was baking it over the fire. It crackled delightfully. Ah Chang, as a demonstration of his skill, fried a fish on an old tile. The fire made its fat sizzle.

Whether it was the fragrance of the bird or the aroma of the fish that attracted Chi-fa is hard to say. In any event he soon arrived on the scene. Carrying his pipe in one hand, a paper taper in the other, some half dry tobacco leaves in his belt, he approached slowly, his nostrils dilating.

"Lucky boys," he said. "You sleep all day, and at night you're out chasing will-o'-the-wisps. What a life."

"Have a taste, uncle," the young fellows hailed him. "Delicious."

"It's bear's paws I want, and panther's liver. Let's see how good you are. If you feed me on that, I'll stand treat to two bamboo containers of wine — each as big as a water bucket."

Four Seasons grinned, the fire-light gleaming on his face.

"Trapping a bear is no harder than spearing a fish," Ah Chang retorted.

Chi-fa sat down by the fire. "I wouldn't be so sure. Wild beasts are much more cunning than men."

"They can't be any trickier than landlords," said Ah Chang.

"I had a fine time hunting when I was young," Chi-fa asserted. "I've seen some marvellous things. Take foxes, now. When a fox wants to catch a rabbit, it dances first. The swishing of its big furry tail makes the rabbit dizzy. Then the fox pounces on it. Never mind about tigers, just take foxes. When they fight, they hit each other in the eyes with their tails. . . ."

"Who doesn't know that?" Ah Chang turned over his fish. "There's nothing marvellous about that."

Chi-fa put some fresh tobacco in his pipe. Raising his head, he said: "What's your hurry? I haven't come to the marvellous part yet. Once, when I was roaming the mountains, I met a wild boar. I didn't really want him. It wasn't boar I was after —"

"It was tigers," Ah Chang inserted.

Ignoring the interruption, the old man continued evenly: "But my trigger finger was itchy, and I let blast. But I missed. Now a boar is that kind of an animal. Once you stir him up, he never lets you go. He came at me, and I dodged behind a tree. He saw me, and tore around to the other side. We two just kept running around that big tree. A man in danger thinks fast. I took off my coir rain cape and flung it down a steep slope. The boar, thinking it was me, charged after it as fast as he could travel. The slope was covered with slick grass. That old boar was moving so fast he couldn't stop. He went tumbling down the slope and landed in the bottom of the ravine, flat as a pancake. It saved me a lot of trouble."

Sprinkling salt on his fish, Ah Chang gave the old man an irritated glance. "We've heard that story a hundred times. Come and have some fish. It's all ready."

"I'll wait for the paws of that bear you're going to kill," Chi-fa replied.

Old Chien returned. He told the young fellows to put out the fire. Sitting down to one side, he seemed wrapped in thought.

Chi-fa could see that his old crony was in no mood to chat. He re-filled his pipe and departed.

Four Seasons and Ah Chang crowded around the old hunter. "How about it, Uncle Chien?" they queried. "Did you find anything?"

"Boar tracks heading this way on the mountain slope — one big pig and two little ones; bear tracks on the near side of the stream. I didn't cross over, but tomorrow I'll see whether there are any more bear tracks on the other side."

"What about tonight, uncle? Will any wild beasts come down from the mountains?"

"The wind's rising. They'll probably search for food where they are."

"I'll climb up the tree and take a look," said Four Seasons. Old Chien laughed. "What for?"

"After dark this place is like the bottom of the sea. With just the three of us, we won't find any bears if we run our legs off. They could be ruining crops a distance away and we wouldn't even see them."

Chien pointed at the sky. "Wait till the stars shift their position. That will be time enough."

Four Seasons sat down and leaned against a tree. He gazed out over the fields. Clang — Ah Chang rammed his fishing spear into the ground. No one spoke.

Old Chien pondered over the tracks he had discovered.

3

That night they waited in vain. The two young fellows had been eager for action. Four Seasons had been hoping to kill a panther — he wanted a fur vest. Ah Chang longed to jab his spear into a wild boar, and enjoy a good meal of its savoury meat. When nothing happened, they felt rather deflated.

But the next night, wild boars came down from the mountain and pillaged a large section of the crop. Four Seasons and Ah Chang slept soundly through it all. Old Chien didn't hear them. It was really infuriating. Four Seasons blamed Ah Chang for not awakening him. Ah Chang wanted to know why Four Seasons hadn't kept watch in the tree. They wouldn't look at each other.

Four Seasons said: "You ought to take that fishing spear down to the stream and feed it to the turtles. That's all it's good for."

Ah Chang said: "Your bird calls won't attract any wild pigs. They're not interested in love-sick doves."

Although the village was divided into an upper and a lower section, the two were not far apart. Both were at the east end of the valley. The fields were west and south of the village. The western fields were nearest the mountain where the wild animals were. A stream flowed south out of the mountain ravine, then turned east, as if to embrace the village. From the tracks Old Chien had discovered, it appeared that the bear usually crossed over from the western side of the stream. But he could find no tracks there, probably because the beast was clever enough to wade down through the stream and come ashore only where the corn fields met the stream's eastern bank. Although there were tracks of some sort leading down the mountain slope, these were more blurred, and not as clear as the bear prints on the near side. Some wild pig and panther tracks were also discernible.

Old Chien said it's better to use your brain than your legs. He and the young men dug a pit at the mouth of the ravine and covered it with branches and turf. But the animals came by a different route, and destroyed another large patch of corn.

One night as the old hunter was walking along a path on the western slope, he spied a bear entering the corn fields. He fired, hitting a white spot on the bear's neck. Old Chien immediately leaped to the opposite side of a mound and, cradling his gun, flung himself down and lay motionless. The bear opened its big mouth and reared up, enraged. Its beady eyes searching for its tormentor, the bear weaved to and fro. Suddenly it crashed to the ground like a collapsing tower. It was at that moment that Four Seasons and Ah Chang came running up. Ah Chang examined the dead animal and said it was a big female. Four Seasons insisted that it was a male.

Old Chien agreed that it was a large black she-bear. Stroking his beard, again he pondered.

At daybreak, when the villagers learned that a big bear had been shot, there was great excitement. The bear was carried to

the compound of the production brigade office. Grandmas and grandpas, carrying youngsters, came to see the sight.

In the office, voices seethed like a boiling pot.

"You've got to hand it to the old man," said one. "Going out with two green hands and shooting a big bear like that, he's all right."

"A real hero doesn't boast of the past," said another, "but I can tell you: If Old Chien were twenty years younger, he could get ten bears without any help from anyone. He once dealt with three panthers in a row, all by himself."

Chi-fa shouted to make himself heard above the crowd. "This is the bear that's been ruining the crops. If you don't believe me, skin it. You'll find corn kernels in its fat."

"If the mountains weren't closed to the public we could send all the hunters in the brigade up and clean the wild beasts out once and for all," someone exclaimed.

"Animals have sharp noses," Chi-fa yelled. "Once they get a whiff of gunpowder, they don't dare to come again. We don't have to worry about our autumn crop any more. When I heard that shot last night, I could tell from the sound that the bullet had gone home. That one shot, I said to myself, will save thousands of catties of grain."

"Two bamboo containers of wine," a voice shouted. "Each as big as a water bucket." It was Ah Chang. Everyone looked at him in surprise. "Uncle Chi-fa promised to treat us to two tubes of wine if the hunters' detachment killed a bear," he explained.

Chi-fa reddened. "I've got the wine. Come to my house and drink it."

"I'll contribute another tube," Pai Mao called from the crowd. "That will give one to each hero."

"We accept," exclaimed Ah Chang, grinning. "Only make sure your tube isn't a cartridge shell and you don't ladle it out with an ear-pick spoon."

The whole room burst into laughter.

His face red as a beet, Chi-fa cried shrilly: "Come drink at my house. I don't care if you climb into the wine vat."

The commune's Communist Party secretary, who was standing near Old Chien, approached him and asked: "Do you think we'll have any more trouble with wild animals?"

With his finger, the old hunter traced a word on the secretary's palm.

The Party secretary nodded.

Old Chien didn't say a word.

The villagers were sure that now the predatory beasts would withdraw their claws. To their surprise, the destruction of the crops grew worse. It looked as if that stream-crossing bear was getting craftier. He always managed to escape the hunters and wade ashore at a different point.

One cold night the clouds hung low. Icy air from the forest crept along the stream and spread out into the fields. Fireflies gleamed balefully in the tall grass like the eyes of savage animals. Peacock cedars and ancient cypresses stood motionless, as if frozen stiff.

To ward off the chill, the two young fellows built a camp fire. Both were down in the dumps. But Four Seasons had not forgotten to snare two partridges. And Ah Chang had caught a fat fish. They were roasting these in the fire.

Chi-fa's nose, according to Ah Chang, was one of the keenest in the village. Wherever something fragrant was cooking, the old man was sure to appear. Within a few minutes, he reported at the camp fire.

"We didn't touch a drop of your wine," Ah Chang reminded him. "Today, what's more, we're inviting you to try some of this delicious fish."

The old man scratched his head hesitantly.

Ah Chang turned the fish over with a branch. "A real first-class dish."

"Big, isn't it?" Chi-fa murmured. He got a couple of thin branches and shaped them into chopsticks.

"The partridge is ready too," Four Seasons announced. "Have some."

"With good fish around, I don't want anything else," replied Chi-fa.

"Tell me, uncle," Ah Chang asked. "Why are we losing more corn than ever, after killing that bear?"

With the fish resting comfortably in his belly, Chi-fa was ready for a long dissertation. "Nothing strange about it," he said. "There are hundreds of bears, and thousands of paths they can come by. You can't be everywhere at once, and there are only three of you. Killing one bear doesn't end the whole species."

"Bears and wild pigs don't eat much corn, but they spoil a lot by knocking it to the ground," said Ah Chang. "Yet in our fields, except for a few fallen ears, all of the rest of the picked corn has been taken away. How do you explain that?"

"My boy, my boy, four-legged beasts know many more tricks than the two-legged kind. Have you ever seen rats stealing an egg? One of them grips it in his four paws, while another takes his tail in his teeth and drags him along like a little cart. How does a hedgehog move fruit? Why, it rolls on them and pierces them with its quills. Then it carries them home."

"Who cares about that?" Ah Chang demanded impatiently. "We're asking you about the corn."

"That's exactly what I mean," Chi-fa drawled. "There are bears and bears. Once, when I was your age, I was day-dreaming on the steps of the ruined White Elephant Temple. We had a bad harvest that year. Suddenly, a big black bear jumped out of the hollow of an old tree. I got an idea. After the bear was far away, I crept into the hollow for a look. It was full of corn. Our corn must also be in some bear's den."

"I don't believe it," Four Seasons asserted. "No bear could carry that much."

"Everybody knows that when a bear puts an ear of corn under his left arm, the one under his right falls down. He can ruin a whole row of corn, but he can't carry a single ear away."

"My boy, my boy, there are bears and bears. Some of them have real finesse in their crudeness. Once I lost my basket. I searched everywhere, but couldn't find it. The next winter Old Chien came back from hunting in the mountains. He said he saw my basket in a bear's den — full of corn. The four-legged beasts are shrewder than men. When a weasel crosses a stream, it carries its little ones on its back. When an elephant grows old and

knows it's going to die, it heads for the elephant cemetery in the hills. . . ."

"We ask about one thing and you talk about another," the young men chorused. "How did the bear go off with so much corn?"

"Maybe he tossed it into the stream and let the water carry it away."

That sounded plausible, but the young fellows weren't fully convinced.

Since they didn't argue, Chi-fa pressed on animatedly.

"Clumsy bears sometimes can be very delicate. Twenty years ago, a woman in upper White Elephant Village put her baby in a basket and hung it on a limb. Then she went to work in the fields. When she returned, both baby and basket were gone. At first she thought some neighbour had taken the child back for her, but when she got home it wasn't there. Nearly out of her mind with worry, she bought a stick of incense, and hurried to peacock cedar to pray to the goddess. Just as she was lighting the incense, she heard her baby crying. She flung the stick aside and dashed up the mountain in the direction of the sound. There was her baby, still in the basket, and there was a big she-bear, playfully rolling child and basket on the ground. Thinking only of her infant, the mother rushed forward, snatched up the basket, and fled. The child wasn't hurt a bit. The bear was so surprised it could only watch the mother running down the mountain. It didn't even chase her. Now you tell me — how did a big hulking bear get a tender little baby and basket up the mountain?"

Chi-fa slowly filled his pipe and lit it, then looked at the young men triumphantly. It was as if all his words that night had been making a rope and this glance was the knot that tied them together — a knot that meant: Well, boys, now do you understand?

He rose to leave. Gazing around, he chuckled. "Old Chien still not here yet? Maybe his arthritis is acting up. I've a good home brew for that. All he has to do is drink it with a strong wine, and he'll be cured."

Ah Chang was annoyed. "Uncle Chien has gone to the Party committee."

Four Seasons gave Ah Chang a significant look.

Chi-fa said no more, and departed quickly. The tree leaves were now rustling as well as the corn, a sign that it was getting colder. Chi-fa disappeared into the darkness.

Peering after him, Four Seasons mused: "I wonder what's keeping Uncle Chien."

Quite irrelevantly, Ah Chang said: "Why do you suppose there are no bear tracks on the other side of the stream?"

"The bear wades down through the water. He makes tracks only when he mounts the bank," Four Seasons replied thoughtfully.

"Oh." Ah Chang again fell silent.

"I'll go and have a look at the pit trap," said Four Seasons. He got up and walked away.

Ah Chang was left alone. As he extinguished the fire, he thought: What made Chi-fa take off so suddenly when he heard that Uncle Chien had gone to the Party committee? I shouldn't have told him.

5

Old Chien's arthritis was troubling him again, but he never mentioned it. He placed a bamboo mat beneath a tree, and spread it with hay. Over this he built a shelter of sunflower leaves to ward off the night drizzle.

His jaws were clenched against the constant pain, and his face was considerably thinner. But his eyes burned brightly.

Wind sweeping down from the mountains in the night rustled the corn leaves loudly. The fields were so vast that even if a wild animal slipped in among the crops, it would be difficult to detect it. The two young men intensified their patrols.

One night, they and the old hunter returned from their wanderings to the shelter beneath the tree. To their surprise, Chien told Four Seasons to start a camp fire.

Although he complied, Four Seasons asked: "Won't it keep the wild beasts from coming out of the hills?"

Ah Chang too protested. "The most fun is catching them alive." Nevertheless, he also gathered firewood. To the two young fellows Chien's word was law. They trusted him implicitly.

Soon they had a roaring blaze. Their faces reflected red in the glow. Ah Chang fetched some water in a leather bucket.

Four Seasons poured the water into an earthen pot and set it over the fire to boil.

While they waited, Four Seasons, his face sombre, asked Old Chien: "What makes Chi-fa chatter so? Why is he always covering up for the bear? Tonight, when we've got such a big fire, why doesn't he come?"

"It's late. He's busy swiping corn," asserted Ah Chang. "He's no time to gab with us."

"Chi-fa fishes in troubled waters and blames everything on the bear," said Four Seasons. "He's trying to get everyone confused. I'm going to catch him in the act."

Old Chien looked at the two young men. "You shouldn't make wild guesses like that. Chi-fa is one of those woolly people who drifts through life without any purpose. But he's a good man. I know him."

Chien was so definite, the young fellows could say no more.

It became colder. Pearls of dew covered the thick leaves of the sessile hemp. The fence of cactus was a dark green net, with sharp needles protruding in all directions. But they seemed unable to keep out anything. Pretty wild flowers, growing near the fence, were a red line in the dark.

Suddenly, Old Chien leaped to his feet. "Get your fishing spear," he said to Ah Chang.

Ah Chang was amazed. He looked at Four Seasons. What could have got into the old man, the young fellows wondered. He lights a big fire, and now he wants to go fishing in the middle of the night.

"Get your spear," Chien repeated.

Ah Chang hastily picked up his spear. Four Seasons banked the fire with a few shovelfuls of earth.

"Come with me. We're going to catch a wild boar," the old hunter said in a low voice.

Four Seasons pricked up his ears and listened. Except for the rustling of the corn, he couldn't hear anything special. Where was the boar?

Ah Chang was puzzled. Why the fishing spear? At the words "wild boar" he couldn't help feeling a bit alarmed. Gripping his spear in one hand and his gun in the other, he followed Old Chien towards the foot of the mountain.

The old man, in the lead, listened carefully as he walked. To his young trainees he explained: "Wild pigs never like to turn back. They just keep pushing forward, head down. Bears like to travel with the wind, but wild pigs prefer running against it. You hear that?"

Four Seasons couldn't hear anything that sounded like running. "The pit," Ah Chang shouted.

Only then did Four Seasons hear the noise of something scrambling about in the pit trap.

Old Chien turned and looked at them with a grin.

The two young fellows realized that a boar had fallen into the trap.

After a backward glance to make sure the camp fire had not risen again, Four Seasons ran towards the pit. But Ah Chang got there first. He wanted to give that dirty old boar a jab with his spear.

The old man led them to the edge of the trap. Inside they could hear hoarse panting.

Old Chien listened. "Just one animal."

Ah Chang stepped closer. He was going to jab at the beast through the branches covering the pit.

The old hunter stopped him. "Don't provoke that boar. Use your forked spear to spread on another layer of branches and leaves. Don't let any light in. The pig will be quieter in the dark. Tomorrow, when it's daylight, we'll take it alive."

Ah Chang gave a shout of laughter. "So that's why you wanted me to bring my fishing spear."

Four Seasons hooted like an owl, then broke into a merry whistle.

After they covered the pit thoroughly, they returned to Old Chien's shelter.

Filling a bamboo cup of boiled water from the earthen pot, Four Seasons presented it respectfully, with both hands, to the old hunter. Then he poked up the fire.

Old Chien sipped the hot water. "Bring your fishing net tomorrow," he instructed Ah Chang. "We're going to need it."

"Right," said Ah Chang. "Boar's meat won't be enough. For a savoury meal we should have a couple of fish too."

The old hunter merely smiled.

Blossoms floated down from the tree into his cup. He blew them aside and drank deeply of the hot water. Then he lapsed into thought.

Uncle Chien certainly knows his wild animals, Four Seasons and Ah Chang said to themselves, but he doesn't understand people nearly so well.

6

Once more night lowered its curtain. Ah Chang and Four Seasons spread the net at the mouth of the stream as Old Chien had ordered. Then they and the old man hid in the darkness and waited. But that night they didn't catch anything.

Two more nights passed. The fourth night, as darkness gathered, a wind blew down from the hills. On the slope, they built a camp fire. Then they stole down and concealed themselves near the edge of the stream. Although they wore padded clothes, the cold air coming off the water was penetratingly chill.

Several hours passed. A real owl hooted on the mountain. The watchers saw a bear, walking upright, moving from the east towards the near side of the stream.

Four Seasons poked Ah Chang, who had been dozing. Ah Chang opened his eyes with a start and saw the bear, advancing erect towards the water's edge. His hair practically stood on end with surprise and excitement.

Old Chien waved his hand. Although it was dark, the two young fellows seemed to see his signal more clearly than if it were daylight.

They hastily pulled the net. The bear fell with a thud on the bank, its head landing in the water. Panting, it uttered low groans.

Ah Chang and Four Seasons nimbly wrapped the bear in the folds of the big net. Then, one at each end of a pole they had prepared for the event, they carried the bear back to their camp. There they tied it securely to Four Seasons' observation platform.

Building a fire, they sat around and talked until dawn.

The bear hadn't stirred all night. Now, it moaned a couple of times.

The three men sitting around the camp fire were conversing animatedly. Even the usually taciturn Chien had quite a lot to say. Though his voice wasn't loud, he obviously was in high spirits.

"Uncle Chien," Ah Chang commended warmly, "you figured it out absolutely right."

"But how did you know it was a man?" Four Seasons queried curiously.

"Not a man—a thief," Ah Chang exclaimed, glaring at the observation platform.

"That day we saw the Party secretary I already knew," Old Chien replied calmly. "I traced the word 'man' on his hand. Then he wrote out the man's name and showed it to me. It was the same fellow I had in mind."

"My net is a fishing net. Who would have thought that a man would insist on falling in," Ah Chang said sarcastically.

"When it's daylight, you'll understand," Old Chien continued. "He wore regular shoes to walk from the east end of the village to the stream. There he changed into special boots with bear's paws sewn to the soles. Then he walked back. That gave the impression that a bear had waded over from the opposite shore."

The young men exchanged an interested glance.

"It's an old trick. If you use it too often, people see through it. So he got a bear hide, and sometimes used that. Walking on grass didn't matter, because it doesn't show prints. But when he came to a muddy patch, he put the hide down and walked across it. People thought the bear had just rolled over. They weren't so likely to suspect that it was a man."

The young fellows saw the light at last. All this conformed exactly with the signs they had observed in the past.

"But tonight his scheme went wrong," said Four Seasons. "Before he could start back from the stream he landed in the net."

"The thief must have a sack with him," said Ah Chang, his eyes large. "The corn is probably all in his house."

"When we lit our camp fire, he became bold," Old Chien explained. "He thought he could see us but we couldn't see him."

"Ho," the young men exclaimed.

The clouds scattered and the weather cleared. It was the hunters' detachment's most successful night.

As dawn broke a chill morning breeze blew across the valley. The fire was nearly out. Four Seasons added a few branches.

In the distance, a man appeared. Who was coming to the fields so early? The young fellows peered eagerly.

Old Chien needed only one look. "Chi-fa," he said leisurely.

"That's right. It's Chi-fa," the young men cried, in a single astonished voice. "But how can that be? Aren't they in it together?" They stared angrily at the figure on the observation platform.

Chien halted them with a gesture. "I've roamed the mountains with Chi-fa. He's had a hard time all his life, but now things are good for him. He just hasn't learned that he's one of the masters of our new society yet. Maybe he talks a lot, but what does that matter? If you don't like it, don't listen."

The young men blushed. Then, with smiling faces, they gazed down the path along which Chi-fa was coming.

Chi-fa was happily bearing three bamboo containers of wine. When he arrived at the camp, he exclaimed merrily: "It's getting cold and the nights are damp. I've brought you a little warmth." From inside his coat he pulled out two roasted rabbits. He put these and the wine down beside the fire.

Crinkling his eyes, Old Chien said: "We've prepared a present for you too. It will cure your gabbiness."

"You've caught another big she-bear?" Chi-fa cried delightedly.

"We sure have," Four Seasons retorted. "Only it's not a she."

"In the pit?" Chi-fa asked.

"This time he didn't land in the earth. He went up into the sky," said Ah Chang, pointing at the observation platform.

Chi-fa didn't understand. "Why put him up in a tree? A big black thing like that. He's not a monkey."

"Come on, I'll show you," said Four Seasons.

"We'll get some really delicious bear paws out of this one," cried Chi-fa.

"I'll lower him down from the tree," said Four Seasons. "Take a good look."

"Don't think I can't climb even that high," said Chi-fa. "I'll go up myself." He clambered on to the platform. It creaked as the bear stirred uneasily. "You caught him in a fishing net?" he demanded, amused.

Four Seasons by then had climbed up beside him. "Look closely," he said, "and you'll understand."

Chi-fa leaned forward. That was no bear, it was a man. Chi-fa was amazed.

The man had his nose pressed against the side of the platform. He didn't want to show his face.

"Who is he?" Chi-fa demanded. "Why did he do it?"

"Why?" Four Seasons retorted angrily. "Hey, get up. Pick your head up."

The man turned around. It was rich peasant Pai Mao. Chi-fa swore:

"So it's you? Still sticking to your greedy ways."

Again he put his hand inside his coat. He hadn't yet given Old Chien the home brew he had brought for his arthritis.

*Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Illustrations by Huang Yung-yu*



Selections from the Classics

Yueh-fu Folk Songs

THE ONE I LOVE

The one I love
Lives south of the great ocean.
What shall I send to greet him?
A tortoise-shell comb with two pearls
Hung from pendants of jade.
They tell me he is untrue
And I shatter the gift and burn it,
Shatter the gift and burn it,
And scatter its ashes to the wind.
From this day on
No more must I think of him,
No more must I think of the time
When the crowing of a cock, the barking of a dog,
Made me tremble lest my brother and his wife hear us.
Shrill wails the autumn wind,
Swift the sparrow-hawk takes flight;
Soon the sun will rise in the east
And shed light upon my heart!

A PLEDGE

By heaven,
I shall love you
To the end of time!
Till mountains crumble,
Streams run dry,
Thunder rumbles in winter,
Snow falls in summer,
And the earth mingles with the sky—
Not till then will I cease to love you!

GATHERING LOTUS

South of the river is the place to gather lotus,
Where among teeming leaves
Fish dart and play!
North and south,
East and west,
Between the lotus leaves they dart and play!

A CROW'S FATE

A crow with fledglings eight or nine
Nested on a cassia tree in the Chins' yard—

Caw!

The son of the family was a reckless youth,

An adept with a powerful catapult
And pellets mixed with balsam.
A catapult and two pellets in his left hand;
He circled about the birds—

Caw!

His first pellet dealt our crow a mortal wound
And straight to heaven above her spirit soared!

This mother bird laid her eggs
Among the boulders of the South Hill—

Caw!

Her fledglings were safely hidden away from men,
For the twisting path through the hills was hard to find.
Ah, but white deer in the emperor's park at Shanglin
Are bagged by archers for dried venison;
Wild swan which fly to the vault of the sky
Are captured and cooked for the palace;
And the carp in the depths of the River Lo
May find a hook in its mouth—

Caw!

All men have their allotted span of life,
Then why complain whether death comes soon or late?

THE EASTERN GATE

Outside the eastern gate
He hardly dare go home;
Once over the threshold,
He chokes with grief again:

Not a peck of rice left in the pot,
Not a coat on the peg behind.
Sword in hand he starts back to the eastern gate,
But his wife clutches at his sleeve and weeps.

"Others may hanker after rank and riches,
I am content to share your gruel with you.
By the blue sky above,
Think of your unweaned child!
Do not do this thing!"

"Bah! Let me go!
Already it is too late.
Are we to drag on like this
Till our hair is white?"

A WIFE LONGS FOR HER HUSBAND

Green, green, the grass by the river,
And in thought I follow it far, far away;
So far that I can hardly picture him,
And yet last night I saw him in a dream;
In a dream he was by my side,
But I woke and he was in a distant land,
A distant land, strange parts;
Tossing and turning I longed for him in vain.
Even a withered mulberry feels the wind,
Even the ocean water feels the cold.

Men come home to fondle their dear ones,
Who would carry word to me?
But a stranger from far away
Brings me two fine carp,*
I call the boy to cook them
And find in them a message on white silk.
I kneel to read —
What does his letter say?
"Take good care of your health," he starts,
And ends, "You are every moment in my thoughts."

HOMESICK

Flitting, flitting, the swallows before the hall;
In winter they vanish, in summer they return;
Yet I, with two brothers of my own,
Am still a wanderer in a strange land.
Who will patch my old clothes?
Who will stitch and mend for me?
The good woman of the house is kind,
She takes my clothes and mends them;
But her husband coming home,
Framed in the doorway, looks askance at me.
I tell him, "No call to look at me like that!
When a brook is clear the stones are seen."
My conscience is crystal clear,
Just let me end my wanderings and go home!

* In ancient times letters were placed between two pieces of wood cut out in the shape of a fish.

TO A FAITHLESS HUSBAND

Plain as snow on the hills,
Clear as moon among the clouds
Is your change of heart, they tell me;
And so I've come to bid you good-bye.
Today we've drunk a measure of wine,
Tomorrow we must part by the canal.
I shall walk beside the royal canal
Whose waters flow east and are gone,
And wonder if my grief will ever end.
No girl need cry when she's married
If her husband is a single-hearted man
Who will not leave her till her hair is white.
Pliant the bamboo fishing rod,*
Wet, wet, the tail of the fish.
A man who valued constancy
Would set no store by money!

THE FAN

Fine, freshly woven silk of Chi
Is white as frost or snow;
A piece, embroidered, makes a fan
As round as the bright moon.
My lord keeps the fan about him,
Its motion makes a gentle breeze for him;

* In old Chinese folk songs "fishing" was often a covert allusion to lovers' meetings. The neglected wife is thinking back to their courtship.

But I dread the coming of autumn
When cold winds steal away the sultry heat
And the fan is tossed, unwanted, into a casket,
Its short term of favour ended.

A BUTTERFLY CAUGHT BY A SWALLOW

A butterfly, flitting through the eastern garden,
I am caught among the clover
By a swallow foraging for her young in spring!
She carries me off deep into the purple palace
And wheels around the capital of a pillar;
Her fledglings hop for joy
At sight of the food in her beak,
Craning their necks and eagerly flapping their wings.

FAR FROM HOME

I sing a song of grief instead of weeping,
Stare into the distance instead of going home,
And dream of my native village,
My heart full to bursting.
I would go back but have no one to help me,
I would cross the river but there is no boat;
No words can tell my longing,
It seems as if wheels were grinding over my heart!

THE DRIED FISH

The dried fish, ferried across the river, weeps;
Too late he repents his folly!
He writes a letter to the bream and tench
Warning them to be more wary!

TO A HUSBAND FAR AWAY

Soft and pliant, the lonely bamboo
Rooted in the mountain;
But, married to you,
I am like the dodder clinging to a vine.
As the dodder has its season of growth,
So husband and wife should have time to be together,
Yet a thousand *li* divide us since we married,
Far-stretching mountain ranges lie between.
Longing for you makes me old before my time,
It seems your covered carriage will never come!
I grieve for the orchid,
So splendid when it flowers,
For unless plucked in time
It will only wither away like the grass in autumn.
What can I do
But trust to your constancy?

PARTED LOVERS

Far, far away, the Cowherd,
Fair, fair, the Weaving Maid;*
Nimble move her slender white fingers,
Click-clack goes her spinning-loom.
All day she weaves, yet her web is still not done
And her tears fall like rain.
Clear and shallow the Milky Way,
They are not far apart!
But the stream brims always between
And, gazing at each other, they cannot speak.

THE OLD WIFE AND THE NEW

She went up the hill to pluck nettle-seed,
She came down the hill and met her former husband.
She knelt and asked her former husband:
"How do you find your new wife?"

"My new wife is good,
But no match for the old one.
In looks there is little to choose,
But she is less clever with her hands."

*The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid are the Chinese names for two constellations separated by the Milky Way.

"Your new wife came in through the front door,
Your old wife left by the side door."

"My new wife is good at weaving raw silk,
My old wife at weaving white silk;
One weaves forty feet of raw silk a day,
The other fifty feet and more of white silk.
If you compare raw silk and white,
The new wife is not up to the old."

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi
and Gladys Yang



YU KUAN-YING

The Yueh-fu Folk Songs of the Han Dynasty

Yueh-fu folk songs occupy an important place in classical Chinese literature next only to the *Book of Songs* and the *Poems of Chu*. They began to appear in the second century B.C. That was a time when poetry was in decline and compared with the poetic works of the men of letters, the *yueh-fu* folk songs had a wonderful freshness and vitality. They represent the best poetry of the four hundred years of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) and exercised a great influence on the development of classical Chinese poetry down the centuries. They are a valued part of our cultural heritage today.

The original meaning of *yueh-fu* was Music Bureau, the name of an office set up in the second century B.C., the function of which was to compose music, train musicians and collect songs. Most of the songs then used in court ceremonies were written by court scholars while those sung on ordinary occasions were mainly folk songs from different parts of the country set to folk music. Before long these songs came to be known as *yueh-fu*, and the best, those which have stood the test of time, were the songs made by the people.

Yu Kuan-ying is an authority on classical Chinese literature. Another article of his, *China's Earliest Anthology of Poetry*, appeared in *Chinese Literature* No. 3, 1962.

We know from historical records that this Han dynasty conservatory of music attached considerable importance to collecting folk songs and transcribing them. Thanks to this fine tradition, many excellent songs and ballads were preserved and widely circulated and the Music Bureau has an honoured place in the history of Chinese literature.

Folk songs were collected on an extensive scale. According to the section on literature and art in Pan Ku's *Han Dynasty History*, the imperial library had 138 folk songs of Western Han (206 B.C. - A.D. 24) from various parts of the Yellow and Yangtse River Valleys. Unfortunately most of these have since been lost. Barely forty Han folk songs are left today, most of these dating from Eastern Han (A.D. 25-220).

Music played a large part in the life of the Han dynasty not only among the common people but even among the nobles and emperors, some of whom liked to sing or play musical instruments. This was one reason why the government searched far and wide for good folk songs and trained so many musicians to play popular music. It seems likely that some wealthy and noble families of that period encouraged their protégés to collect folk songs too, for not all the Han songs that we have today are mentioned in the official records, and some must have been discovered and transcribed by private individuals.

The comprehensive *Yueh-fu Anthology* compiled by Kuo Mao-chien of the Sung dynasty (960-1279) employs a method of classification adopted by all scholars in this field after him. The largest section consists of Choral Songs, a form of ballad evolved by the peasants and poorer townfolk of the Han dynasty. Similar in style are the Miscellaneous Songs Set to Music, the original tunes of which had been lost. The folk songs or ballads in these two categories are the flower of Han dynasty poetry.

Another section is the Drum-and-flute Songs. Eighteen "hand-bell songs" of this group are still known to us. This was originally martial music, some of it folk music, used by the Western Han armies. The Miscellaneous Folk Rhymes of the last section were never set to music and therefore, strictly speaking, should not be considered as *yueh-fu*, yet they reveal a kindred spirit, some of them being enchanting poems with a significant message.

Pan Ku tells us that *yueh-fu* were made and sung by the common people "when moved to joy or sorrow or eager to speak their minds." Or as Ho Hsiu, another Han scholar, said of the folk songs of the ancient *Book of Songs*, here you heard "hungry men singing about food and working men singing about labour." The authentic voice of the people, these folk songs made it clear what the people loved and hated. Although they may have been edited and touched up by the scholars and musicians who recorded and set them to music, their profound truthfulness and poetic brilliance still shine through undimmed today.

These folk songs may be divided into four groups according to their subject-matter.

The first and most noteworthy group is that which reflects the sufferings of the people, enslaved and exploited as they were by the nobles and officials. These songs reveal the main contradiction in that society. The earliest of the *yueh-fu* folk songs were collected in the reign of Emperor Wu (140 - 87 B.C.) when protracted aggressive wars and the building of countless palaces and mansions so undermined the country's strength and prosperity that the end of the reign saw much instability and unrest, with popular uprisings in many districts. Moreover, the oppression of the people by the imperial house, corrupt officials and influential families continued unabated until the end of the dynasty. The people, plunged into ever greater misery, gave voice to protests and to lamentations as they rose in revolt or fled from their oppressors.

Fighting South of the City and *At Fifteen I Joined the Army* show the consequences of years of aggressive warfare. Soldiers either died miserably on the battlefield or returned home, old and worn out, to find their homes in ruins. These songs make it clear what havoc and suffering were caused by the unjust wars waged by rulers greedy for power.

Sometimes, goaded beyond endurance, men fled or rebelled. *The Eastern Gate*, published in this issue, describes how a poor man, driven to desperation, decides to take the law into his own hands. His wife begs him with tears not to risk his life by doing something unlawful, yet he cannot be dissuaded. This moving scene gives food for thought. Life itself teaches the oppressed, until a day comes when they take up arms to challenge the existing order. In

the Han dynasty there were innumerable uprisings, sometimes threatening the capital itself.

Among the *yueh-fu* are fables like *A Crow's Fate* in this issue which make some animal or bird voice the feelings of the down-trodden. A crow and her young are perched on a tree, doing no harm, when a young man with a catapult kills her in sport. The crow's ghost regrets that she ever left the southern hill, then reflects that even there she might not have been safe, for birds, beasts and fish all fall prey at last to men's greed. The best thing to do, she concludes, is to submit to fate. This pessimistic lament of some good but weak character, obviously influenced by ruling-class ideas, also arouses sympathy because it reveals the cruelty of the oppressors. The highly fanciful short poem *The Dried Fish* is clearly a warning to others lest they, too, fall victim to oppression.

Another important group of *yueh-fu* deals with poverty and homelessness. The rich landlords and merchants of the Han dynasty went on seizing land from the peasants until wealth was concentrated in a few hands and countless peasants and small tradesmen were bankrupted and forced to become slaves in rich families, roam the country in search of work, or beg for a living. *Far from Home* in this issue, written by a homeless wanderer, starts with the lines:

I sing a song of grief instead of weeping,
Stare into the distance instead of going home.

Of course, staring into the distance is no substitute for returning home, but this was all the unhappy vagrant could do, and this poor form of consolation testifies tellingly to his homesickness.

Another song published here, *Homesick*, deals brilliantly with the same theme. This narrative poem has a strong lyrical flavour. The wanderer here tells how a kind-hearted woman mends his clothes, but because of this he falls foul of her husband and this makes him long to go home, for roaming strange parts is no life for a man. The feeling expressed here is less strong than in *Far from Home* but scarcely less moving.

A third group of *yueh-fu* exposes the iniquity and luxury of the upper class. One well-known example is *By the Roadside Mulberry*.* An official sees beautiful Lofu plucking mulberry leaves

to feed her silkworms and when he tries to seduce her he is rebuffed. The poem starts with a detailed description of her costume, then subtly yet vividly evokes her beauty by describing other people's reactions to it.

When a wayfarer sees her
He sets down his burden
Awhile, strokes his beard.
A youth when he sees her
Doffs cap and salutes.
The ploughman leaves ploughing,
The hoer his hoeing,
And back in their houses
Find fault with their wives,
Having gazed on Lofu.

The song goes on to tell how the official invites Lofu to drive home with him in his carriage, but is sternly rebuked for his pains. Then Lofu boasts of her own husband, so handsome and noble, and her detailed account of his dress, position and looks corresponds well with the opening portrait of herself. The poem ends there, leaving the reader to imagine the discomfiture of the official at the hands of this beautiful, fearless and witty girl.

*The Song of the Orphan** describes an orphan in a landlord merchant family who is treated as a slave by his elder brother and sister-in-law. This song condemns the cruelty of a well-to-do feudal family, exposes the true nature of the exploiting class, and shows sympathy towards its victims.

Cock-crow, Meeting in a Narrow Road, There Is a Lane in Changan and other songs depict the luxury of the rich and noble, whose gates were adorned with gold and whose halls were paved with marble. They drank and amused themselves while torches flared bright in the courtyard, and in their backyards they kept rare, exotic birds. All their sons became officials, some high ministers with a stipend of two thousand piculs of grain, and the women did no rough work in the house but simply played string instruments and made music. What a contrast to the life of poor families like that described in *The Eastern Gate*!

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 6, 1960.

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 6, 1960.

Love and marriage are another important theme in the *yueh-fu*. Like similar folk songs in the *Book of Songs*, most of these songs described the feelings of women. *A Pledge* and *The One I Love*, published in this issue, are both drum-and-flute songs which use vivid images to convey great depth of feeling.

Since the women in feudal society were economically dependent on men and considered as inferior to them, their fate often depended on the whim of some man. In *The Fan* which we publish in this issue a woman compares herself to a fan, and says:

But I dread the coming of autumn
When cold winds steal away the sultry heat
And the fan is tossed, unwanted, into a casket,
Its short term of favour ended.

The Old Wife and the New, also published in this number, seems to go deeper into man's inconstancy than the songs about abandoned wives in the *Book of Songs*. For this poem deals not with the woman's suffering but with the remorse of her former husband who divorced her for no reason, although she worked better than his new wife and was not inferior in looks.

The greatest narrative poem in ancient Chinese literature, *The Bride of Chiao Chung-ching*,* belongs to the end of this period, the third century. The highest achievement of the *yueh-fu* folk songs, this poem of over three hundred and fifty lines narrates the whole tragic story of a feudal marriage and is a powerful indictment of feudal morality. Liu Lan-chih, a good, hard-working and beautiful girl, is married to Chiao Chung-ching at seventeen and the young couple love each other. But Chiao's mother treats the new bride cruelly. Although Lan-chih starts to weave at cock-crow and does not rest till late at night, her mother-in-law scolds her for idling, finding fault with her for no reason and accusing her of discourtesy and wilfulness. In less than three years, Lan-chih is forced to go home. Then a magistrate and a governor come to seek her hand for their sons, and her brother as head of the family forces her to agree to marry the governor's son. The day before the wedding, Chiao Chung-ching and Lan-chih

meet in secret and pledge themselves to die together. That evening she drowns herself, he hangs himself.

This story shows how the feudal system destroyed the happiness of young people, forcing them to rebel. The lovers' suicide was an act of rebellion to which they were inexorably driven. If they had not taken their own lives, they would have had to betray their love and submit to those evil forces which had destroyed their marriage. Their deaths, which thwarted the dark forces of feudalism, were in fact a powerful protest against them.

The poet relating this story shows explicitly which side he is on, expressing deep sympathy for the persecuted couple, approval of their love and struggle, and strong condemnation of Chiao's mother and Lan-chih's brother who represent feudal morality and the feudal family system. At the end of the poem the dead lovers are buried together, cypresses and plane trees shade their grave and two love birds — the metamorphoses of their spirits — sing to each other in the boughs to symbolize the lasting and steadfast love which no force can destroy. This ending reflects the people's firm belief that the fight for freedom in marriage would finally triumph.

From the examples cited above emerge some of the main characteristics of these folk songs.

First, these songs give a clear, comprehensive and strongly realistic picture of the life of the times. They show us the trials and tribulations of soldiers, peasants, poor townfolk, homeless wanderers, orphans and forsaken wives, as well as the luxury and cupidity of officials, landlords and their followers.

Secondly, a large proportion of these songs, as we have seen, are narrative poems. Some describe a single episode, others a story in its entirety. Indeed, narrative poems not only form the main bulk of the Han *yueh-fu* but are the finest among them. Their brilliant characterization marks a new stage in the development of Chinese narrative poetry. The distinctive features of different characters are often expressed through dialogue, and effective repartee makes the language graphic and lively. Owing to the preponderance of narrative poems, the *yueh-fu* in general are longer than earlier songs and employ more detailed descriptions. The descriptive detail in poems like *By the Roadside Mulberry* and *The Bride of Chiao Chung-ching* is a special feature of *yueh-fu*.

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1959.

More extensive use is also made of similes and metaphors, while human beings are occasionally represented by members of the plant and animal kingdoms, and these strange fancies add a romantic flavour to the poems.

Yueh-fu folk songs embrace a great variety of forms, including four-character, five-character and irregular lines, although the five-character lines are the most common. The songs with an irregular metre or five-character lines are more expressive than the poems in the *Book of Songs* which adhere mainly to four-character lines.

Yueh-fu folk songs enriched Chinese literature and proved an unending source of inspiration to later poets, bringing fresh life to the poetry written by men of letters. Thus the celebrated third-century poets like Tsao Tsao and his sons who wrote of the confusion and unrest of their war-torn age depicted contemporary events in the manner of the *yueh-fu*, using old *yueh-fu* titles and employing the same narrative method and simple language. Another great poet who owed much to their influence was Tu Fu of the eighth century, who roamed the Tang empire in troubled years and wrote with keen insight and profound sympathy about the sufferings of the people. He was followed later in the eighth century and in the ninth by Po Chu-yi and Yuan Chen, who also carried forward the *yueh-fu* tradition, writing about the problems of their own times and affirming that "poetry should be written for a purpose." The tradition of writing about real life had a great and lasting influence on Chinese poetry, while even more widespread and enduring was the *yueh-fu's* influence on poetic forms and methods of expression. Their irregular metre and five-character lines, more flexible and expressive than the old four-character lines, became the prevalent poetic form for several centuries after the Han dynasty.

Travel Notes

FENG MU

Tiger Leap Canyon

Starting on the lofty plateau of China's northwest, the River of Golden Sands (*Chinsha*) flows south in a broad stream into Yunnan Province. At a place called Stone Drum it makes a sudden forty-five-degree turn and sweeps northeast between two towering mountains—Haba and the Jade Dragon. The walls are high and the passage is narrow, and the river seethes as it surges through. Then, abruptly, the course drops, and for a dozen *li* the river is converted into a huge torrent of tremendous power that writhes down through the canyon like a mad dragon. Finally it breaks free from the grip of the mountains and becomes once again broad and placid.

It was this deep gorge, called Tiger Leap Canyon, that we wished to explore.

Among the Nasi, Pai and Han people who inhabit the banks of the River of Golden Sands there are many myths about the canyon. To me, the most poetic one is this:

The Golden Sands, the Lantsang, and Nukiang Rivers were originally three sisters who dwelt on the northwest plateau. They decided to journey to the Eastern Sea to seek their fortune. On the way they were intercepted by the rough Jade Dragon, his brothers and their guard, Haba. Confronted by such formidable enemies, the Lantsang River and the Nukiang River abandoned their plan and flowed south. But the determined Golden Sands would not concede. She pretended to go south also with her

sisters. But in the still of night, while the overconfident enemy slept, she dashed northeast through an opening she discovered in the bronze-walled defences of the Jade Dragon, and charged east to join the Yangtse. When the Jade Dragon and his cohorts awakened, they found their defences irreparably breached. In a gash between themselves and their guard, Haba, the River of Golden Sands, laughing victoriously, was flowing east. Rage turned the Jade Dragon and his brothers into the twelve peaks of the Jade Dragon Mountain. Their guard still glowers before them as the hulking Haba Mountain. And the River of Golden Sands, with the eternal sound of triumphant laughter, rolls between them unimpeded.

We heard many similar stories, each deepening the aura of beauty surrounding the canyon and intensifying our desire to explore it. In a town near Stone Drum we completed our preparations. Members of the local people's commune helped us obtain a few sure-footed Yunnan ponies. Carrying food and camping equipment, we set out along a winding path on the northern bank of the River of Golden Sands.

We were on dangerous ground from the very start. Before us, clad in silver armour and helmets, the snow-covered peaks of the Jade Dragon and Haba Mountains pierced the clouds. Some were clad in white mist, some shone golden in the setting sun. When clouds hid the sun they turned a steel blue, dark and menacing. Our path, rising ever higher, clung to the sides of sharp inclines.

For a long time we had eyes only for the magnificent scenery ahead. We did not look at the River of Golden Sands, cutting deeper and deeper below us. Except for the roar of its waters, we were unaware of it as we sat peacefully on our plodding ponies.

Then our mounts slowed to a halt. We could feel the ground shaking. We gazed down, and our hearts contracted. Without our knowing, the path had narrowed till it was just a ribbon only a foot wide perched precariously on the shoulder of Haba Mountain. The cliffs flanking the river below suddenly seemed very near. We were right on top of them. The mountains were pressing in from both sides. Two thousand metres below, the river was tossing golden waves against the rocky shores.

Cautiously we dismounted. Like our animals, we stuck close to the cliffside as we slowly advanced. Sometimes the path rose, sometimes it descended. A howling wind accompanied us through the pass, joining the roar of the waves in the depths below. Every step we took was with the care of a tight-rope walker. None of us cared to look down; the sight made you dizzy. Once in a while a hoof nudged a stone off the path. It was a long time before you saw the splash.

But the hardships of our journey didn't bother us, for we were enchanted by the view. Soaring peaks, like fully armed warriors, lined the sides of the river in uneven ranks. On their heads were helmets of ice, clouds draped their shoulders, their torsos were blue-grey expanses of naked stone. Imposing, fierce, odd, or grotesque, they resembled all sorts of things — weapons, flowers, wild beasts, giants. . . . Each time we turned a bend we saw a new and gorgeous scene. Yet even before we had time to fully appreciate it, still another appeared before us.

We had to admit that our original plan had been too ambitious. In our first day's travel we only reached a Nasi hamlet on the steep side of a mountain slope. It consisted of a few wooden cabins. Everyone was busy gathering the ripe beans in the surrounding fields. Shiny green new wheat swayed in the breeze. Walnuts were ripe on wide shady trees. We had to admire the hard-working people who had wrested fertile land from these forbidding and rocky mountains.

It was the next day, not long after we had set out again, that we discovered that our journey would be much more difficult than we had anticipated. We were compelled to leave our luggage behind. If we wanted to see the most beautiful part of Tiger Leap Canyon, we were told, we would have to go to the village of Walnut Grove. But no one could say exactly how far we would have to travel.

And the path was becoming more and more dangerous. With the river raging beside us like a dragon, now near, now far, the path often flew over sheer cliffs, or crossed abrupt mountain ridges. At times, the way ahead was blocked by boulders which some giant hand had pushed tumbling down in thunderous landslides from the snowy peaks. The huge rocks formed great piles, some teetering on the edge of precipices. We saw one slab, forty

feet square and ten feet thick, balancing halfway out over the gorge. It looked as if one little touch would send it plummeting down. Yet it was coated with moss. Who knew how many years it had been there? We had a frightening few moments, for our path went right over it.

But the strangest of all was yet to come. Our path was cut by a ravine several dozen metres wide. To our left was a sheer drop. Where was the path? Along the face of the cliff. Nothing could stop the mountain dwellers. They had cut hand and foot holds in the cliff face. With the aid of these, just like the mountain folk, we climbed down.

After refreshing ourselves from a clear spring at the base of the cliff, we started up the opposite side. A luxuriant tree grew horizontally out of the stone wall. Beneath its roots, from a hole like an open mouth, gushed a silvery spring, which spread and cascaded down into the river in a long fine waterfall.

Our guide pointed out Walnut Grove on a mountain slope in the distance. We could see the trees in the village and terraced wheat fields. But just as, sweating mightily, we hoped to reach our destination in a final spurt, another awe-inspiring sight confronted us. A huge fissure blocked our way, as if some giant had split Haba Mountain open with a mighty blow of his axe. So you want to go to Walnut Grove, do you? Well, you have to go down into the gorge and then up to the top of the other side first.

We had no choice but to muster our remaining energy and descend cautiously, like circus acrobats, to the bottom. Looking up, on both sides we saw ninety-degree cliffs. A large spring spurted like a silver sword from a fissure high on Mount Haba. Midway, it formed a jade green pool and from there overflowed and tumbled down in stages until it finally poured into the River of Golden Sands.

In this tremendous cleft you could not help being impressed by the immense power of nature. Every freshet, every boulder seemed to have been placed exactly where its beauty could be seen to best advantage. We forded a stream beside an enormous boulder which looked as if it had only recently fallen from the summit. Half of it was buried in the ground; the protruding half was like the head of some weird beast. Crossing a stream

over a small bridge was like leaving the animal's mouth. You could see the coloured pebbles at the bottom of the crystal clear water. The little stream was like a strip of gay fabric hanging from the towering cliff.

We climbed the path on the opposite of the cleft. It was paved with stones of red, yellow, green, white and black. This dazzling road led us to the summit. Once again we saw our destination — Walnut Grove. This time it really was close, with no obstacles in between. From the top of the mountain it resembled a toy village nestling amid foliage at the foot of the slope. But we had to descend like rolling stones for a full twenty minutes before we finally arrived.

Famed for its many walnut trees, Walnut Grove was actually quite a poor mountain hamlet — a few stone houses against the cliffs; odd-shaped boulders all around. A cliff formed one of the walls of the house we stayed in.

South of the village was the River of Golden Sands. Its roar was like a herd of stampeding horses. That night, lying around the fire, we felt as if we were on board ship. The noise of the water and the wind blended with the sighing of the pines. The very ground seemed to tremble from the buffeting of the waves.

Yet amid these fearsome forces of nature, people lived quietly and well. When I awakened after dozing a while, in the light of the fire I saw our host grinding into flour wheat that had just been harvested.

For a real view of Tiger Leap Canyon it was necessary to descend to the foot of the mountain. The next morning, as the rays of the early sun filtered between snowy peaks, burnishing them a golden yellow, we set out for the river, led by Old Hsiung, the hunter. A gun and a coil of rope on his back, he took us step by step down a steep path that barely afforded foot holds. We frequently had to clutch at bushes, and jump from one ledge to another. At times we could only advance inch by inch, our stomach pressed against the cliff like lizards on a wall.

Everyone's clothing was drenched with sweat by the time we halted on a high bluff. Our guide told us that if we looked down and to the west, we would see the true Tiger Leap Canyon. Only after we found places where we could stand relatively firmly and gazed around did we realize what an exposed spot we were on.

Across the river, looking near enough to touch, was the main peak of Jade Dragon Mountain, rising so precipitously you had the feeling it was about to topple into the water. The cliff we were standing on was also extremely sheer. When you peered down you could see only the river but not its near shore. All around us were grotesque precipices. Jade Dragon Mountain and Haba Mountain were so close at this point that they seemed to be embracing above the river, and their peaks pierced the clouds. Gazing west into the narrow gorge, you had the feeling that the walls tapered towards each other on top, and that at any moment they might meet.

Below — about a hundred metres — the river lashed and roared like a great golden dragon through the narrow gorge. Clutching bushes, we gazed down cautiously. But after a minute or so our eyes swam and we had to straighten up.

Our guide sat cross-legged on the ledge, calmly smoking his pipe, as he pointed out places of interest. Further west, he told us, were two square crags flanking the river. They were known as the Tiger Leap Cliffs. They were so close no one could doubt that a tiger could leap across. The local Nasis also called their location "Bow Delivery Station." According to ancient legend, warriors used to toss weapons to each other across the gorge. Our guide also informed us that a good fairy lived on the snowy peak opposite, where she patrols on a white horse. Whenever a tiger or leopard endangers the local inhabitants' flocks, she shouts a warning from the mountain top. Following his finger, sure enough on a flat wall on the snowy peak opposite we could see where erosion had carved a shadowy figure of a woman on a horse.

For the best view of Tiger Leap Canyon, our guide said, you had to go down the cliff face on a rope. That was how the local hunters stalked mountain goats. We politely rejected this romantic proposal, not seeing much point in risking our necks for the sake of feasting our eyes.

On our way back to camp, we met two primary-school kids picking wild fruit. They asked whether we had come to survey a power-station site. The channel here dropped five hundred metres in only a few *li*, they told us proudly, as if construction on the dam was already starting.

The life of the people here is hard, but they have a fine spirit. Although they are short of tillable soil and plant on patches where even walking is difficult, they are entirely cheerful as they wrest a living from a cruel and capricious nature.

We passed through another hamlet, called Jipulo, where life is fairly comfortable. The people dwell on the cliffside. The leader of the co-operative, a Pai who had served in the People's Liberation Army, told us that their grain is "pulled from cracks in the rocks." Each time they plough they turn up a fresh layer of rocks, all of which have to be removed before they can plant. But like the sturdy peaks around them, these people never gave an inch to the pitiless elements. On the contrary, since liberation they have improved their livelihood year by year.

Now, in a township of five hundred population, they have twenty-five hundred sheep and over two hundred head of cattle. They aren't crushed by the mountains or frightened by the tumultuous river. Waging an unceasing struggle against severe nature, they are winning victory after victory with their strong bare hands.

The day we left Tiger Leap Canyon along the high mountain path, the peaks seemed to float above clouds which filled the valley. A storm broke. Wind howled, rain fell, thunder rumbled. Thick clouds rose from the valley, from the tops of the trees, obscuring our vision. But the storm quickly passed. The river wind scattered the clouds. In the distance, high amid the cliffs, we saw the little village where we had stayed. It looked particularly clean and pretty after the rain. Smoke rose from the chimneys of the wooden buildings.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro



HO WEI

White Herons and Sunlight Cliff

There was a time, two or three thousand years ago, when no smoke from human habitations could be seen on this part of China's southeastern coast. All the cliffs and shore were a nesting-place for beautiful white herons. Coming none knows whence, these birds settled down in this desolate spot untrodden by the foot of man to multiply from century to century. In the face of fearful odds, they carried in the seeds of strange plants and flowers till young rice shoots were springing up on this desert island as well as many exotic sub-tropical plants. Time went by and white herons remained here year after year, while little by little the island became better able to support living

creatures and turned into the Heron Island we know today. This was the name given Amoy up to the fourteenth century and the time of Emperor Hung-wu of the Ming dynasty.

The local people tell a story handed down for generations about these white herons. Tradition has it that after the herons opened up this island, some serpent monsters tried to seize their home into which so much toil had gone. The good herons resisted staunchly and after a series of fierce mortal struggles finally succeeded in driving the serpents away. This myth made by early toilers to show how freedom triumphs over slavery, light over darkness, adds colour and romance to Amoy. And even today, on nights when huge waves pound the shore, white herons still haunt the faint memories of the old, flitting through the thick foliage of hoary banyan trees, trailing long slender legs, or preening their silky white plumage with sharp beaks.

Such memories belong to the past. Yet soon after coming to Amoy I started noticing white herons everywhere. The traveller who leaves the train after a long journey is first received, as a rule, by the massive stone pile of Heron Hotel, the windows of which overlook ocean waves which glimmer in the morning or evening sunlight, reflecting light into the room from Heron Straits between Amoy and Kulangsu. The noisy bustling road by the shore with its endless stream of traffic and pedestrians is known as Heron Highway. In the streets you find pedicabs with the white heron sign and a Heron Cinema. Behind bright foot-lights is staged a new dance-drama entitled *The White Heron*, while the name is used for a celebrated wine and a new brand of cigarettes, to say nothing of a host of other daily necessities. Walking through the winding streets and arcades of Amoy, you see this ubiquitous sign in all the shops, till it seems the streets are full of white herons. In fact, to me it seemed that a white heron spirit was watching over this heroic town to defend our eastern coast.

Amoy has a glorious record of struggles against foreign imperialism. The red thread of patriotism runs through its history. As early as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was invaded by the Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish colonialists in turn. Later, Japanese pirates harried many points of the coast, and the

famous Ming general Chi Chi-kuang of the sixteenth century resisted their onslaught here. After the Opium War in the nineteenth century, the imperialists made Amoy one of their five trading ports; and during the War of Resistance Against Japan the town was once more overrun and left in ruins by the enemy. Again and again, it seems, serpents invaded this region only to meet each time with shameful defeat.

White herons, flying over the long stream of Time, have settled down among the people of Amoy who love peace yet will fight to protect their motherland. The heron has come to symbolize their resolute spirit, to symbolize their courage, industry and wisdom. It has its home in their hearts and will never fly away.

A sunny autumn day on the south coast is as warm as late spring. One afternoon we went north of the town to see the Martyrs' Memorial. Amoy is surrounded by high cliffs and great boulders. A broad, stone-paved highway climbs straight to the hills, and in the distance we could see the tall monument commemorating the martyrs. "The Mighty Spirit of These Martyrs Will For Ever Guard the Sea Coast!" Soaring and magnificent, the tablet bearing this inscription in gold, stands out in strong relief against the blue sky and white clouds. Three or four flights of steps, several dozen in all, lead up from four sides to the memorial. Behind it is a huge round tomb, nearly forty paces around. After climbing the steps to it, by standing on tiptoe you can just see two small iron windows on the flat roof of the tomb.

The streets of Amoy are famed for their cleanliness, and the white stone approach to the Martyrs' Memorial is as immaculate as if newly washed. The avenue of phoenix saplings recently planted is a lovely sight when the tender green feathery leaves sway in the breeze. When these phoenix trees are fully grown the avenue will look even more magnificent. In May and June every year, clusters of blossom over the tops of these trees make splashes of crimson visible far and near, and the falling flowers scatter the ground like a crimson carpet. From the distance, you see a layer of bright crimson above, green leaves in the middle, and red petals below, a splendid and colourful tapestry of crim-

son and green which lasts until nearly September. Amoy in the summer is covered with crimson flowers.

Behind the memorial, beyond the intersecting railway lines, I was surprised to discover a rugged mountain path half hidden among thorny clumps of cactus and brambles. This winding path takes you up to a craggy height, and strolling along the swarthy, jagged cliffs, you can look down on the serried roof-tops of Amoy and on the Heron Straits, which girdle the town with silver, glimmering waves. As dusk approaches and smoke rises from every chimney, Kulangsu in the sunset seems an exquisite illustration from a book of fairy tales. Far off in the misty waters of the sea float a handful of islands unearthly in their beauty, appearing only to vanish again from sight. The tiny, delicate pavilions among green trees have an unsubstantial, dreamlike quality. Someone pointed out for me the highest peak of Kulangsu, famed Sunlight Cliff.

We visited Sunlight Cliff the following morning. It is only a few minutes by ferry from Amoy to Kulangsu. Once ashore, a few dozen paces brought us to a veritable labyrinth of lanes and narrow paths dipping up and down with the hills. They were sweet with the fragrance of flowers, these secluded byways; the thick foliage of pliant mimosa boughs stirred gently by the roadside while phoenix leaves clustered like emerald clouds over small villas, their walls covered with creepers from which peeped some early sprays of poinsettia to gladden the eyes of all with their gay crimson. Closed doors and quiet courtyards made these long, narrow lanes seem almost deserted; but sometimes the breeze carried the sound of a piano. A haunting Chopin serenade brought home to me the transitory nature of spring as its sweet notes floated through those quiet lanes like fallen petals carried off by a stream in spring. At one time there were more pianos per head in Kulangsu than anywhere else in China. This fairy-tale island, free from the rumble of traffic, is a network of lanes filled with sunshine, flowers and music.

Historic Sunlight Cliff stands in the middle of the island. We climbed the steps up the hill to the stone gate of the drill ground used by the naval forces under Cheng Cheng-kung, the seventeenth-century patriot known to the west as Koxinga. The

narrow gate in the massive wall admits only one man at a time and, fingering the worn gateway, we could not help lingering to recall the past. Presently we clambered further up the stone path to the old Cave of Summer Cool, and immediately felt its chilliness. A huge slab of rock above the cave threatens to crush the head of each traveller with its enormous weight. All around the rocks are traces of the ancient fortress: old battlements covered with moss, walls hung with creepers. It was here, three hundred years ago, that Cheng Cheng-kung trained his naval forces in preparation to recover Taiwan.

One by one we climbed a narrow iron ladder to emerge outside the cave. On the top there is a round look-out which holds no more than twenty people at a time. This, the summit of Sunlight Cliff, was our destination. The wind from the sea was blowing so fiercely towards us that we could hardly stand and had to lean against the iron railing. As we gazed towards the horizon, we saw a wide expanse of red-tiled roofs, while scattered here and there among the luxuriant dark green leaves were yellow, blue and dove-grey sanatoria. The sea and sky were a clear, translucent blue, free from any dust or smoke, so that the Tatan and Erhtan Islands seemed close at hand. This reminded us of the scene three centuries ago when, according to historical records, Cheng Cheng-kung's powerful navy held many manoeuvres here. It must have been a magnificent and stirring spectacle when his huge war-galleys, with banners shading the sky, raised a thunder of drums and cymbals as they waited for the start of the expedition!

Three hundred tempestuous years passed between February 1, 1662, when Cheng Cheng-kung wrested Taiwan back from the Dutch, and February 1, 1962. To commemorate his victory, a Cheng Cheng-kung Museum is being built by the stone gate of the drill ground on Sunlight Cliff so that visitors can review their history here.

We descended by the winding path, lingering on the golden autumn beach, forgetting to return. Suddenly foaming white waves rolled in from the horizon, bright silver billows that urged each other on from the distance rearing higher and higher, roaring louder and louder, like horses galloping forward with

thundering hooves to dash with a mighty tumult on the beach. The splash and roar of the foaming, leaping waves rang like passionate calls in our ears. And gazing out over the illimitable ocean in the bright autumn sunlight, I saw several of our gunboats patrolling the coast, cleaving the waves as they steamed off towards the horizon, ploughing up lines of gleaming foam in their wake. For a long time I watched the brave advance of our people's naval forces. "The tide of my heart rises high as the waves." And my thoughts at this time were far, far away.

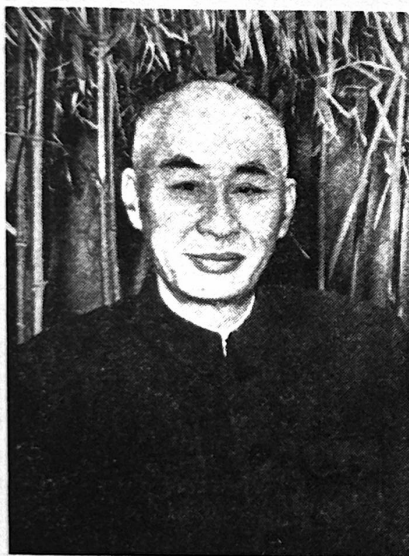
Translated by Yang Hsien-yi
and Gladys Yang
Illustration by Li Ping-fan



Interview

LU CHIEN

A Visit to Yeh Sheng-tao



The veteran writer Yeh Sheng-tao lives in a typical Chinese-style walled-in compound in a small lane somewhere in the east city of Peking. I went to see him one spring day and though it was late in the afternoon the little yard was still filled with sunshine. Yeh Sheng-tao waited for me at the door of his study, a neat little room with a scroll by Tang Ying, a Soochow painter of the Ming dynasty, on one wall. The sunshine from the southern window fell on a pot of yellow jasmine in full bloom. It was like a har-

binger of spring, which is what the flower is called in Chinese.

We talked first of Yeh Sheng-tao's early years and how he began to write. "I was born in 1894," he said reminiscently. "Because my father had no money to send me to college after I finished secondary school, I worked for about ten years as

a primary-school teacher in Shanghai near my home, Soochow. The failure of the bourgeois democratic revolution in 1911 filled me with dismay. I came across people and incidents of interest in my life as a teacher. And so in 1914 I wrote a story about a poverty-stricken mother and son devoted to each other. It was *Poverty*, my first short story, and that was how I began to write."

"But perhaps I should take 1919 as the real beginning of my life as a writer," Yeh Sheng-tao quickly corrected himself. "In the spring of that year, *New Tide*, a fairly progressive magazine in Peking wanted some stories. Urged by some of my friends, I once again tried my hand at story-writing which I had not attempted for several years. I wrote *Her Life*, a miniature picture of the tragic inhuman fate of women in old China. It was then the eve of the May the Fourth new cultural movement when anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ideas were spreading and the people demanded emancipation. Many questions were brought forward, among them the question of women's emancipation. *Her Life* was written under the influence of such ideas."

After *Her Life*, Yeh Sheng-tao wrote many more short stories and gradually became known throughout China as a story writer.

Yeh Sheng-tao told me how he joined in the movement for new literature. "In 1921," he said, "Cheng Chen-to, who was then a university student in Peking, wrote to Mao Tun in Shanghai and myself in Soochow suggesting that we found the Literary Research Association. The Association's manifesto declared that literature had a most important part to play in man's life and that those working in this field should look upon writing as a lifelong career just like industry or agriculture. It maintained that this was no longer a time when literature could be regarded as an amusement in moments of pleasure or as a diversion in moods of depression, but that it should be written "for life's sake." At that time I also felt there was no point in literature describing only flowers and moonlight and the like. Literature should, as Lu Hsun pointed out, expose the ills and hardships of society and rouse people to seek ways of remedy. . . ."

Thereafter, imbued with the desire to search for the "truth of life," Yeh Sheng-tao, observing life with a cool objective eye and using his subtle, sensitive pen, wrote stories reflecting his deep sympathy for the oppressed and humiliated in the lower strata

and exposing and criticizing the iniquitous vulgar society he saw. *Bitter Greens* depicts a peasant so heavily oppressed and exploited that he detests farming even in his dreams, while *Ab-feng* describes the unhappy life of a child-bride. By way of contrast, *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm* portrays a timid primary-school teacher whose sole concern during a war between two war-lords is the safety of his own family and *A Friend* satirizes small townsmen who live insignificant lives without ideals. Yeh Sheng-tao's pen painted truthful scenes of life in small towns and cities and created vivid images of men in the lower strata of society and minor intellectuals.

"I lived in towns and villages and in the cities," he told me. "I wrote about what I saw. Since I was a teacher for many years, in contact with those in the field of education, I wrote comparatively more about teachers. I found it impossible to write purely from imagination and I never tried to do so. In most cases, when I saw something that disgusted me, I felt like 'satirizing' it and that was how my stories were written. For instance the hero of *How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm* is typical of characters I have met more than once. Because I had some insight into their minds I was able to characterize Mr. Pan fairly realistically."

How Mr. Pan Weathered the Storm is one of Yeh Sheng-tao's representative works and one of the outstanding stories in modern Chinese literature.

It should be pointed out that the keynote of Yeh Sheng-tao's earlier works was exposure and criticism of society. But though questions were posed, he was unable to point the way out. In some of his stories, Yeh Sheng-tao even took "beauty" and "love" to be the essence of life and regarded them as the requisites for bringing "light" into a colourless existence. These illusions, however, were inevitably destroyed by reality and, once over this hurdle, Yeh Sheng-tao took a big step forward in his way of thinking. He was able to analyse and portray reality with deeper insight which gave his writings a stronger realism.

Thus a new trend appeared in his work. Yeh Sheng-tao described this period in his life in these words, "Between 1921 and 1923 I went from Wusung to Hangchow and thence to Peking, teaching in a secondary school and a normal school and lecturing in a university. In 1923, I moved my family to Shanghai and

lived there until 1937 when the Japanese imperialists invaded China and Shanghai fell to the enemy. I worked as editor in a publishing house and also as a teacher. Shanghai was a tempestuous and stirring place in the years following 1925 as the Chinese people's demand for resistance against Japan and national salvation rose to new heights. Living in Shanghai, the greatest centre of the working-class movement in China, I came into contact with revolutionaries and learned of their activities. I could not but reconsider what subjects to deal with and how to write. I felt a change was necessary in my writing. That was how I came to write the novel *Schoolmaster Ni Huan-chih* and such stories as *Night*."

Night, written in 1927, tells of the death of two revolutionaries. Speaking about this story, Yeh Sheng-tao said with feeling, "A true incident provided me with the theme of this story. A young revolutionary couple were arrested and their case was regarded as serious because a suitcase belonging to a well-known revolutionary writer was found in their house. They were two very promising young people but not long after we learned that they had been killed. In those days, many patriots and revolutionaries gave their lives heroically for the cause. I could not remain unaffected by all this. I felt constrained to protest against the white terror imposed by those who had betrayed the revolution to pay tribute to the staunch revolutionaries who remained true to their ideals; I longed to show the awakening of the broad masses and their desire to revolt. That was how I wrote *Night*; if I remember correctly, it was my first story on this kind of theme."

Night marked a turning-point in Yeh Sheng-tao's writing. Immediately afterwards, he wrote his well-known novel, *Schoolmaster Ni Huan-chih* which was serialized in the *Shanghai Education Journal* in 1929 and published in book form in 1930. The hero of the novel was still at secondary school during the 1911 revolution. When the revolution was defeated he "felt the sorrows of life," but he was a man with passionate ideals. Since he had no opportunity to do political work he became a primary-school teacher thinking to achieve national salvation through education. Life itself showed him that his aim was unattainable. He was swept into the May the Fourth Movement and later met his old schoolmate Wang Lo-shan, a revolutionary from whom he learned

that "to transform society it was necessary to get organized." Leaving his home town, he went to Shanghai and joined the anti-imperialist struggle of the Shanghai workers in 1925.

"What I wanted to depict in that novel," said Yeh Sheng-tao, "was the thoughts and mental make-up of certain intellectuals during the tempestuous period of great changes from the 1911 revolution to the May the Fourth Movement and the anti-imperialist struggle in Shanghai. I wanted to describe the long, tortuous path they took towards revolution. I also tried to show my criticism of certain intellectuals who were disillusioned and pessimistic about the revolution when it met with defeat in 1927 and was for some time at a low ebb while the white terror reigned throughout the country. I also wanted to affirm my confidence in the future of the revolution." Yeh Sheng-tao is very modest and after a pause he added, "This novel has serious shortcomings. The first half is quite carefully written with great attention to detail, but the second half is not graphic enough due to my insufficient understanding of the revolution. As for the ending, I let the hero die on purpose. Didn't he say to death, 'Die, die! My feeble limbs and flimsy emotions are completely useless. There will be men completely different from myself! . . .' I placed my hopes in the new people who would be genuine revolutionaries."

Schoolmaster Ni Huan-chih, which Mao Tun has called one of the pillars of modern Chinese literature, was evidently based on the varied experience of the author himself and seems to be a summary of his life up to then. However, it is not an ordinary autobiographical novel but a truly artistic creation. When I expressed this view, Yeh Sheng-tao only smiled.

There is a story in China about the Sung dynasty philosopher Cheng Ming-tao of the eleventh century. A man who went to him for instructions returned after a month to tell his friends, "I have been sitting all this month in a spring breeze!" Talking to Yeh Sheng-tao reminded me of this anecdote, he is so unassuming, refreshing and easy to talk to.

As time marched on, the writer's ideas matured and he looked deeper into life. When the Chinese people were voicing an even stronger desire for resistance against Japanese aggression and national salvation, Yeh Sheng-tao wrote *An Apprentice*, a story based on the struggle against imperialism. In those days when

patriotism was considered a crime, he wrote *A Declaration*. During the War of Resistance Against Japan he wrote in *Our Pride* of a patriotic old teacher with great integrity.

His well-known story, *A Year of Good Harvest*,* deserves special mention here. Written in 1936, the story gives a true picture of the Chinese countryside when a good harvest became a calamity and cheap grain bankrupted the peasants. When the peasants took newly harvested grain to the rice merchants they found that the price of rice had dropped much lower than previous years. The story pointed out in a subtle way that the peasants in desperation were bound to find a real way out through struggle.

"The scene of *A Year of Good Harvest* was the Taihu Lake region where I used to live," the author told me. "But the story paints a true picture typical of the situation throughout China's vast countryside. Those were days with louring dark clouds overhead. In certain parts of China, however, the peasants under the leadership of the Communist Party had started an agrarian movement and found a real way out. Maybe my story could be said to be an echo of that movement."

"I like your way of giving 'the peasants in the old felt hats' no individual names," I remarked.

"Yes, I was trying to paint a composite portrait!"

"Nevertheless the peasants' character and mental outlook were most vividly brought out and one gets a clear picture of that riverside town." Indeed, this story of Yeh Sheng-tao's is generally considered one of his best.

After the liberation of China in 1949, the writer came to Peking. Nearly thirty years had gone by since 1922 when he first visited the ancient capital. During these years the Chinese people had waged long and arduous revolutionary struggles before winning victory and choosing Peking as their capital. Yeh Sheng-tao too had travelled a long way to enter into a new world.

"All waters flow finally into the sea," said Yeh Sheng-tao. "I used to write, almost without exception, about a grey, colourless life and unhappy events. But I also had dreams and I hoped that one day a garden of Eden would be created in this land of ours. This dream I cherished has today come true. After trav-

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 4, 1960.

elling a long, long path through life, I have witnessed the glorious dawn of a new life. This age is ours; the people are now the masters. I had to make a fresh start. I turned from exposing and condemning the old society to depicting the grand new life."

Yes, after the liberation Yeh Sheng-tao shouldered important work in the field of education, and his passion for life and creative writing have remained unabated though he is now close to seventy. He goes to different parts of the country every year: to the southern land of joyous spring and the wind-swept plains of the north. He travels not in search of scenic beauty or quiet retreats but to see the new life of the new people.

"One year I went north of the Great Wall," he told me. "I climbed up a height and found the hills spread below my eyes a sweep of fresh green. I was overwhelmed by the heroism with which our people are transforming our land and seemed to see in that vista the grand future of our motherland. On the spur of the moment I wrote a poem."

He showed me the poem written on rice-paper in forceful calligraphy and read it aloud to me by the southern window:

Rolling hills and jagged peaks are old as time,
And the Great Wall has stood for two thousand years;
But utterly new is the view before my eyes —
Fresh planted saplings cover a thousand hills!

"Life has been transformed! With a truly dedicated spirit, the liberated Chinese people are not only engaged in socialist construction and great projects to transform nature, they have also changed themselves. In our society there are no more girls like Ah-feng, no more men like Mr. Pan. We see heroic people whose characters shine with the radiance of communism. Had Ni Huan-chih been alive he too would have marched forward to become an intellectual of our socialist era."

"Then do you intend to write more stories and novels?"

"I'm still very tempted to!" said Yeh Sheng-tao after a pause. "For instance, there's wonderful material in the life of our cadres or in our new schools. When I visit people's communes or construction sites and when I tour the country I often try to find songs or words to express my joy in the scenes and events, the flowers and trees of our rejuvenated motherland. I have written poems

in the old style and the new as well as sketches and travel notes. They've mounted up considerably in the past few years. The new life and new people are so stimulating and make such a romantic appeal, I can't resist writing about them! This year I intend to visit Yunnan, the land of eternal spring."

"Yes, you're living up to what the people want of their writers."

I took my leave convinced that our veteran writer has entered upon a new stage in his career.



Notes on Art

PAN PING-HENG

The Art of the Jade Carver

It is more than thirty years now since my family apprenticed me at the age of fifteen to a jade carver. I was fascinated by the delicate figures of women and buddhas produced by my master and fellow workers from oddly shaped pieces of jade, and I longed for the day when I too should master this craft.

"To become a skilled craftsman you must first learn to paint," they remarked several times in our shop. I knew nothing about painting and was eager to learn, but who in those days would teach a poor boy like me? Someone told me that Old Cheng, the ivory carver just across the street, was a good painter but a crotchety fellow who did not like teaching others his skills and did not welcome strangers to his house. So I began to wait outside his door every day and would offer to carry his basket for him when he went to the vegetable market. After this had gone on for some time, Old Cheng started to invite me to his house. At first, however, he never talked about painting and refused to teach me. One day he remarked abruptly, "I never copy from paintings and have no special method. If you want to learn to paint, you should do more reading. Old romances and plays like the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Western Chamber*, the *Romance of*

What Does the Parrot Say?

(jade carving)

by Pan Ping-heng



the Three Kingdoms and the *Strange Tales of Liao Chai* are your best models. If you read them carefully and try to visualize the characters and episodes in them, you will learn to paint. When you copy from other people's paintings your own become lifeless, but when you take stories as a model the characters you paint will come to life."

So from that time onwards, every day after work I would read some classical novel. Since, in the beginning, I found it hard to paint figures without a model, I started copying the historical figures painted on some cigarette boxes. In two years' time I had drawn more than a hundred characters from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. When I took these sketches to Old Cheng and asked his opinion, he looked at them and laughed. "You're a bright lad, all right!" he said. "Yes, just carry on like this."

For thirty years I have followed his advice and kept up my reading. From old romances and dramas I turned to ancient legends and poems. These books taught me a great deal of history and general knowledge. Whenever I take up a piece of jade and study it, thinking of the books, the poems and legends I have read, somehow a "living" image appears in the jade in my hand.

Jade carving has a long tradition in our country. The earliest jade carvings were developed from the stone tools of the late neolithic period. By the thirteenth century B.C. the men of the Shang dynasty already had intricately carved jade figures of birds and beasts, pendants shaped like insects and fish, and symbolic jade weapons, to say nothing of bronze vessels and bone objects inlaid with turquoise. By the second century B.C. the art had extended to objects of daily use like jade lamps and dressing-cases, and successive ages saw new developments. In fourteenth-century China the techniques of jade carving were used on other stones and gems.

Jade carvings of different historical periods are displayed in the Palace Museum in Peking, where I often go to enjoy and study them. My favourite exhibit in the Palace Museum is a big block of jade, over one metre high, depicting the curbing of the flood by the legendary hero Great Yu. The artist who carved this in the eighteenth century utilized the distinctive texture and

glossy surface of the jade to show men's triumph over nature in prehistoric times. I have looked at this treasure more often than I can count, yet each time it gives me fresh satisfaction. The bronze sculptures, painted pottery, buddhist sculptures and other exhibits provide inspiration too. They teach me how to design and how to utilize the material, they offer a standard of comparison and bring home to me the great perseverance and meticulous attention to detail required of an artist who would create lovely things. Whenever I handle a fresh piece of jade, I cudgel my brains before trusting myself to set to work on it.

During all my years in this trade I have never stopped studying the work of earlier artists, but, of course, in order to create something new I must constantly study real, living people as well in connection with the characters in my imagination. The classical Chinese theatre has helped me too. My designs profit by its stage characters with their various graceful gestures. By dint of accurate observation, I have learned to keep many images in mind for use whenever needed. Once I was having a meal in a restaurant when in came a girl whose figure reminded me of certain traditional beauties; so all the time she was there I quietly watched her movements. Another day I was walking home through the rain when I saw a large frog squatting by the wall with half-opened eyes, looking rather grotesque. I stood and stared at it for a long time, forgetting the rain. Without observing people and things like this, I could never give life to my jade carvings.

Designing, to a jade carver, is like a game of chess. You must have the skill to open with a brilliant move, for the first move may decide the whole game.

We have two old sayings in China, "A piece of jade may be worth several cities," and "Beautiful jade may be hidden below a rough surface." And there is a well-known legend about a jade worker named Pien Ho, who presented a rough stone containing fine jade to the king. The king and later his son, thinking that Pien Ho was imposing on them, had his feet chopped off, but eventually some perfect jade was discovered in the stone.

A jade worker lays bare the jade by chipping off the rough surface. But there may be blemishes and cracks in the jade, and it takes skill to avoid these while carving. Jade carving is not like clay modelling where you can work two pieces together and

add or remove some material to please yourself. The craftsman, when he is given a piece of jade, has to figure out the most appropriate design for its particular shape and colour.

For years I had been wanting to carve Lady White Snake of Chinese legend. She is a snake spirit who transformed herself into a girl and fell in love with a young man. But a cruel monk came between them. Everyone sympathizes with the brave, good-hearted White Snake, whose husband was taken from her. Well, I found a large piece of white jade which suited my purpose except that there was a red patch on it impossible to remove or avoid—in fact, this red was just where her face would be. As I studied this jade I thought over the White Snake's story. I remembered that she had gone up the magic mountain and stolen a herb to bring her husband back to life, and she had to fight the stag and crane angels who guarded the herb. In my fancy I saw the young wife in her desperation putting the magic plant between her lips in order to free her hands to defend herself. So I made this red blemish into the magic plant. The White Snake of our old legend was a beautiful woman, but there should be

Ying-ning meets a young man





The artist's sketch of *Pao-chan Serves Wine*

Pu Sung-ling, the great story-teller of the seventeenth century, created many lovely heroines in his *Strange Tales of Liao Chai*. One of the best is Ying-ning.* This artless, innocent girl met a young man on the road one day who fell in love with her at first sight, and finally they married. I wanted to carve their first meeting on the road. There was a black spot on the jade I selected for the purpose, and I used this to make a round fan with landscape paintings. Ying-ning is a young girl so what more natural, when she sees a stranger watching her on the road, than for her to half hide her face in shy confusion behind a fan!

Tsao Hsueh-chin in his eighteenth-century masterpiece, the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, presents a scene in which a deft maid-servant, Pao-chan, carries wine and food to her mistress.

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 10, 1962.

something to distinguish her from other mortal beauties. I must somehow show that she was a snake spirit transformed. I had read in a classical work of beautiful Lady Cheng in the third century, who kept a yellow snake as a pet and, by carefully watching the way it coiled and writhed, was able to dress her hair in a new and special style for every occasion! I decided to suggest the White Snake's identity through her hair, and arranged threads in different hair styles until I hit on one which resembled the coils of a snake. Then a careful observer could see from the hair of my jade figure that this was a snake spirit in human form.

In my jade figure *Pao-chan Serves Wine* I show her crossing the threshold with the tray in her left hand, her right hand lifting the flowing ribbons of her sash. She has one foot raised and is glancing over her shoulder. The jade I selected for this was crescent shaped and Pao-chan's posture fully utilized the material. The specks of colour in the jade were carved into bright, lovely fruit on the tray.

In ancient China intense application to study was compared to "cutting and polishing jade." I have devoted all these years to carving and polishing jade and I know how hard it is, what time it takes to cut jade slowly into shape and carve the eyes, eyebrows and other finishing touches. I have often told my pupils, "In all uncut jade there is a beautiful form. It depends whether you have the skill or not to draw aside the veil and reveal this beauty."



Introducing a Classical Painting

CHANG AN-CHIH

Ma Yuan's "Plum Blossom and Wild Ducks"

The history of Chinese art knows several instances of two or more famous painters in a single family. Sometimes it is a case of father and son, sometimes of husband and wife, and sometimes of uncle and nephew. But the most outstanding family of Chinese painters are the Ma's of the Sung dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries). Ma Yuan and his great grandfather Ma Pen, his grandfather Ma Hsing-tsu, his father Ma Shih-yung, and his uncle Ma Kung-hsien were among the best-known court painters of their time. All of them were versatile artists adept at painting flower-and-bird subjects, figures as well as landscape. Ma Yuan's brother Ma Kuei and his son Ma Lin were also fine artists. Of all the seven painters of the Ma family, however, Ma Yuan was the greatest and he ranks as one of the very great artists in the history of Chinese art.

Ma Yuan's dates are not known exactly but he lived sometime between 1140 and 1230. He was preceded by the artist Li Tang (1049-c. 1130) who splendidly combined landscape painting with figure painting. Ma Yuan took over and developed Li Tang's original achievements and, together with his contemporaries Hsia Kuei and Liu Sung-nien, enriched and carried the art of painting of his time to new heights.

It was in his landscapes done principally in ink that Ma Yuan made his greatest contribution. He particularly delighted in the

beautiful natural scenery south of the Yangtse with its many water-ways; this he depicted as a realm of crystal-aired serenity. His brushwork was strong and confident. He achieved striking effects by making superlative use of concentration and contrast in his compositions. The sharp, serrated outline of the rugged crags and sheer cliffs of his mountains and his gnarled pines, stretching out their branches like the clutching arms of warriors in a wild dance, give a special character to his landscapes of mountains and trees. To provide additional artistic stress, he liked to place his figures in a suitable landscape environment. Very few of his flower-and-bird paintings have come down to us, but *Plum Blossom and Wild Ducks* reproduced on the next page is alone enough to show his high achievement in this genre.

A plum tree, lean and gaunt, grows over a sheer precipice; its branches stretch down and across the picture space while a few thinner twigs with sparse buds and blossoms spring out from behind a rock on the left. The far shore, shown with a slanting, twisted line, closes in the upper half and left side of the painting, an effect which sets off the seclusion of the limpid stream.

Yet there is lively motion in the midst of this serenity. The seclusion is broken by a flock of wild ducks coming from the right, striking an active, quickened note of life in the extreme stillness of nature. The artist has vividly brought out the movement of each duck as well as the relations between them. Two ducklings, apparently vying with each other, are in the lead. Behind them comes their dignified and loving mother with one duckling snuggling close by her breast and a saucy one perched on her back. Another duckling, hurrying towards her with tiny, outstretched wings, seems to be jealous of the others. They are followed by three more ducks. One is looking backwards, another follows with lowered head while the third is swimming over to join them. Some distance behind comes the last duck who realizing that he has lagged behind is now hurrying to catch up with the others. These expressions of intimate feeling between the birds enhance the charms of nature and wild life. In depicting the relations among the ducks, the artist has appropriately varied their sizes, the distances between them, their positions and postures and in doing so achieved a rich rhythmic beauty. Movement is also manifested

in the outstretched branches of the plum tree which set off the liveliness of the flock of ducks.

The artist has used the "chopped wrinkles" stroke to depict the rugged lines of the rocks. To show the "wrinkles" on rock formations the brush is wielded with an action like that of an axe chopping wood. This brushwork technique was much used in landscape paintings of the time.

Delicately varied curving lines denote the whirls and ripples on the little stream as it meanders on and where the water is disturbed by the swimming ducks. The feet of the ducks are superbly done; a few strokes in extremely light ink convey their hazy outlines under water.

There is a rhythmically variegated range of tone in the painting. The rock in the foreground is in heavy ink while the plum twigs are sparse and lightly treated. The distant bank in light ink contrasts with the dark plum tree above and before it. The flock of wild ducks dots the clear stream. Variations of tone show the distance and the relation between the different objects and the importance that attaches to each. The dominant tone of the painting is dark grey and this creates an atmosphere of tranquillity and peace. Red ochre is used to draw the wild ducks, with touches of white for emphasis on the neck, wings, breast and around the eyes. White is also used for the plum blossoms to match the touches of white on the ducks.

Gazing at this painting, we seem to smell the fragrance of plum blossoms growing in a secluded gorge, and hear the ripple of the clear spring water; we feel the harmony of tranquillity and motion, of life and nature. It testifies to Ma Yuan's superb art in landscape painting and is an example of his originality in blending characteristic features of flower-and-bird painting with those of landscape. By placing his vividly painted flowers and birds in typical environments, he gave his paintings an added power to move us strongly. This way of combining the two genres of painting took form in the Sung dynasty, a development that exercised a deep influence on later flower-and-bird painters.

Plum Blossom and Wild Ducks ▶

by Ma Yuan (Sung dynasty)



New Films

Li Shuang-shuang

Li Shuang-shuang, produced by the Shanghai Haiyen Studio in 1962, is perhaps the most outstanding film made last year about life in the Chinese countryside. Through the clashes between an ordinary peasant and his wife in a people's commune it reflects the struggle between two moral standards, the old and the new. Since Shuang-shuang and her husband, although very different in temperament, love each other, the tussle between them is played out as a comedy.

In this film, the conflict between the old moral concepts and the new is expressed mainly through the attitude to collective work. Shuang-shuang is a typical north China peasant woman, outspoken and frank. After the establishment of the people's commune in 1958, she starts to work in the commune like the men. Identifying herself with the collective and passionately devoted to it, she works selflessly and takes action whenever she sees anything not right. This often makes her clash with her husband Hsi-wang and others around her who look at things the old way. For example, when she learns that a neighbour has filched some planks of wood belonging to the commune, she immediately protests. Hsi-wang says, "Who are you to butt into someone else's business?" She retorts, "Who am I? A member of the commune!" With that she runs over, grabs the planks and takes them back to the commune.

One day the women hold a meeting in the cotton fields to decide how many work-points each should get. Shuang-shuang points out that Ta-feng has not done a careful job and says, "We mustn't just aim at speed and pay no attention to quality." She won't agree to giving Ta-feng the same number of work-points as the others and the young woman goes off in a huff, declaring, "I don't want any! Work-points aren't everything. I can manage without!" Then Shuang-shuang stays on after all the others have gone to pick the cotton Ta-feng has left on the plants, for although she has pointed out the girl's mistake she wants to help her. Her insistence that work-points must be fairly recorded offends some of the villagers and annoys Ta-feng's husband Chin-chiao, vice-leader of the brigade.



Shuang-shuang is angry

Hsi-wang feels that his wife is going too far and, finding he cannot stop her, he and Chin-chiao both leave home in a fit of anger. Shuang-shuang masters her own distress to comfort Ta-feng, who is also upset by her husband's going away, and Ta-feng is touched by her consideration.

Hsi-wang's contrasting character is well depicted too. He is a kind-hearted, hard-working young man who has inherited from his father and grandfather a set of rules for getting on with other people, and who keeps using the old standards to evaluate new situations. He believes that a woman's place is at home, cooking and minding the children, and tries to stop Shuang-shuang from working outside. But all women are working after the commune is formed, so he cannot control his wife. Hsi-wang takes so little interest in the collective that when asked to do something for the community he tries to get out of it. He neither dares fight against behaviour damaging to the public good nor risk hurting people's feelings, and he criticizes Shuang-shuang for "butting in."

At one point in the film Shuang-shuang discovers that some commune members are slack in their work but this is not reflected in the work-points they get. She writes a poster calling attention to this.

When Hsi-wang sees it he is shocked. "Criticizing people in public now!" he exclaims. "Why meddle in something which is none of your business, like a dog trying to catch rats?"

"You leave me alone!" says Shuang-shuang and goes on writing.

"You're going to offend folk with this," warns Hsi-wang, adding in a low voice, "Shuang-shuang, if you feel you didn't get enough work-points today I'll give you two of mine." He produces some work-point coupons from his pocket.

"I don't want yours!" snaps Shuang-shuang. "I'm not doing this for work-points!"

Hsi-wang, with his eagerness to please everyone and to keep out of trouble, contrasts strongly with outspoken, public-spirited Shuang-shuang. The clash of their different attitudes and temperaments results in many amusing situations for, although extremely fond of each other, the two of them are constantly quarrelling. Once Hsi-wang packs up his things and threatens to leave her. Shuang-shuang, who is now a team leader, begs him not to go.

"All right, I'll stay," says Hsi-wang. "But on three conditions."

"What conditions?"

A family tiff



"You must watch that tongue of yours. Remember you're a cadre now, Shuang-shuang. Weigh your words before you speak. What other cadre behaves the way you do, opening fire right and left all the time like a machine-gun?" He puts his finger to his lips. "From now on, don't talk out of turn!"

"All right." Shuang-shuang nods. "I agree to that."

"Second condition. You're a team leader, so just see to the work of your team. Don't meddle with anything else. Stop behaving like the god of the hearth, poking your nose into everything that goes on."

Shuang-shuang thinks a bit and answers, "All right. Those things I should see to, I will."

"Third condition. Use some tact, and don't criticize the chiefs so much. Chin-chiao, for example. He's the vice-leader of the brigade. How can you fight people above you?"

Shuang-shuang angrily grabs his bedding-roll at that and dumps it outside the door. "Get out!" she cries and tears well up in her eyes.

Hsi-wang is nonplussed for a while, then he says slowly, "Why be so angry? We'll agree to the first two conditions. Forget the third."

And so this particular family tiff concludes.

The new way of living changes the peasants' outlook. Hsi-wang's old rules of conduct find less and less support, while Shuang-shuang's selfless spirit wins more and more praise. In the end her simple-hearted husband finally realizes that his capable wife is right. Towards the end of the film Hsi-wang is sitting playing his flute under a large tree when Shuang-shuang walks over. In all seriousness he says, "Why, Shuang-shuang, you're growing prettier and prettier! Honestly, you've become really clever and good-looking!"

Shuang-shuang answers, "You've changed too!"

Yes, the whole countryside is changing, and along with it people's moral standards and human relationships. In the course of these changes this young couple become more fond of each other. The little daily happenings which reveal their character give this film an authentic flavour of real life. The audience is transported into a village home in north China and into the hearts and minds of Shuang-shuang and her husband during their quarrels and reconciliation.

This film scenario was adapted from a short story* by Li Chun, a talented author who has written many fine short stories and film

* See *The Story of Li Shuang-shuang* in *Chinese Literature* No. 6, 1960.

scenarios in the past ten years about life in the north China countryside. The original story describes a model woman cook in a commune canteen; but the author felt that to make a film he must amplify the original theme and introduce further episodes to show the heroine's character and new moral qualities from different angles and more comprehensively. He said, "I remember when I first had the idea for this story I told myself: There really are women of a new type now in our Chinese villages. So I wrote something about them in my short story. But when I started adapting it for the film, I discovered that my way of depicting Shuang-shuang's character was too simple to reflect the spirit of the new women. Then I reviewed my memories of the stirring life in the countryside. I recalled the first Li Shuang-shuang I had met, the second and the third . . . and all the activities of women like them."

"Once I visited a team in a certain commune and heard the following story: A girl in the Communist Youth League exposed some women who had banded together to steal grain from the team. These women tried to get their own back by beating her up when they were working in the fields. Yet this village girl remained staunch and loyal to the interest of the commune. This incident made a deep impression on me."

"While adding fresh material to the film, I realized for the first time that new characters like Li Shuang-shuang are a by-product of the new collective system. Their qualities represent the main current in our people's outlook during this period."

After the scenario was completed, Li Chun suggested that the title role should be played by Chang Jui-fang, because he felt she could portray the heroine he had in mind.

Chang Jui-fang is one of China's best-known actresses. In the thirteen years since liberation she has made nine films, five of them about life in the countryside. In *Fighting South and North* she played a peasant woman who fought as a guerrilla, and in *The Song of the Phoenix* she starred as the peasant activist Phoenix. Her acting in both these roles was widely acclaimed. Chang Jui-fang said that when she read Li Chun's script she fell in love with her part, feeling that here was a character as clear as crystal.

Chang Jui-fang has caught the spirit of Li Shuang-shuang and given a convincingly natural performance, outstanding for its realism and simplicity. Speaking of her creation of this character, she said, "Acting must be firmly rooted in real life, otherwise the portrayal given by the actor or actress will collapse like a castle built on sand."



Chang Jui-fang as Li Shuang-shuang

During the past decade she has kept in close touch with the countryside, her long stay in different villages giving her a profound insight into the peasants' thoughts and feelings. If not for this, she could never have achieved such resounding success. Her brilliant acting increases the dramatic impact of the film.

Hsi-wang is excellently acted by Chung Hsing-huo, a new find among film actors in humorous roles, whose first success was in the comedy *My Day Off*. His inspired acting and attention to detail make Hsi-wang a well-rounded and likable character.

This film has been warmly applauded both in the cities and the countryside. Many peasants have commented, "We need a few Li Shuang-shuang to improve our team!" Tributes of this sort are very encouraging to the author. "Film-goers have singled out the things I feel most deeply about," says Li Chun. "Their response to the ideas I tried to express makes me feel that we are baring our hearts to each other!"

Chronicle

Exhibitions of Modern Chinese Painting

The two most popular exhibitions of paintings held recently in Peking have been "New Paintings in the Traditional Style" and "Chinese Figure Paintings." The first showed a hundred and twenty-three new paintings by more than a hundred artists using the traditional techniques of Chinese scroll painting for figures, landscapes, flowers, still-life and New Year paintings. It was the figure paintings that attracted most attention. They were outstanding. One of the best was the artist Liu Wen-hsi's scroll *Four Generations*, a portrait of a peasant family from northwest China, a whole history told in four figures. The smile on the great grandfather's face shows his present contentment, but the wrinkled visage and gnarled hands tell of his hardships and sufferings in the old society. The grandfather, a man of middle-age, his firm stance showing his courage and resolution, is clearly a man who has experienced tough struggles in the past. His son is a young tractor driver, competent, fearless of difficulties. The youngest member of this family is the little grand-daughter, a child of the new age who knows no sorrow. The family is painted resting from work in the fields, sure of their future, sure that in the new society life is getting better and better. The artist has depicted the spirit of these people; his vigorous brush strokes mirror their innermost feelings.

Two other outstanding new paintings were *Allotting Jobs*, depicting a woman team leader allocating work in a farm production team, done by Ho Yu-chih in the *pai-miao* (simple sketching) style of illustration used in old editions of Chinese romances, and *Wind from the Sea*, by Wang Sheng-lieh, a painting of eight women militia members doing sentry duty on the sea shore. They hold rifles in their hands; they stand strong and full of confidence in the wind which blows from the sea and ruffles their hair.

The second exhibition, consisting entirely of figure paintings, showed some sixty new works by Peking artists. The artist Shao Yu, well-known for his lively sketches of contemporary everyday life, has contributed a painting entitled *Painting Murals*. Peasant folk artists regularly decorate the walls of their communes with

paintings. Some are agitational posters, others are lyrical scenes, others again are simple decorative murals. Shao Yu's picture shows an old village woman who has just completed the mural painting that forms the background to the picture; plates and bowls of colour stand before her as she pauses in her art to think up her next composition. The originality and freshness in the treatment of this painting aroused great interest among critics and the general public. The artist Huang Chou, who is famous for his paintings of China's national minorities, contributed a new scroll of *Comrades-in-Arms on the Plateau*, portraying the close relationship between the Tibetan people and their People's Liberation Army. The well-known artist Yeh Chien-yu's contribution, *A Scene at Shenchiamen*, shows a sturdy ferryman of an island along the Chekiang coast. Present-day Chinese life was reflected from many angles in this fine collection of figure paintings.

Peking Theatres Go to the Villages

Peking theatrical troupes are making an extra special effort this spring to take their plays out to the villages — plays which the peasants like. The China Youth Art Theatre, touring the Hopei Province countryside, is performing *Taming the Dragon and the Tiger*,* a play in six acts describing the enthusiasm and heroism of the people in a mountain region who build a bridge across dangerous rapids during the Big Leap Forward of 1958. In this production the theatre uses certain techniques and dance movements taken from the traditional opera; peasant audiences, who are extremely fond of the classical theatre, are particularly delighted by this and the up-to-date theme of the play.

The Peking People's Art Theatre has given fifty performances of *The Red Propagandist* for its village audiences. This play by the Korean playwright Jo Paik Lin is about present-day life in the Korean countryside and has a particular interest for China's socialist farmers; they recognize many of their own situations and typical characters in it.

The Central Opera and Dance-drama Theatre produced a new opera specially for its current tour of the north China villages. Called *Snatching the Seal* its action is laid in a rural commune of today. A rogue, who was a creature of the landlords in the old

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 9, 1960.

days, manages to worm his way into the leadership of a production brigade and succeeds in doing much harm before he is unmasked by a former poor peasant, a Communist cadre, and the brigade leadership is brought back on to the correct path. The peasants say: "We can draw many good lessons from this play . . . it's about life in the villages and is exciting. We like it!"

During these tours, playwrights, producers, actors and actresses eagerly seek comments and opinions from the peasants about their work and performances so that they can do better next time.

Studying China's Folk Music

Researchers of the institute of Chinese music are continuing their study of the music of China's many national minorities. So far they have visited twenty-six different nationalities to collect their musical compositions and learn more about their music. They now have, among other works, musical works of the Chuang people, Miao folk songs and reed-organ music, Li folk songs, Shieh folk-song duets, the text and music of the renowned Tibetan classical dance-drama *Nangma* and of the folk dance-drama *Todzbae*, the dance music *Sairam* of the Uighurs and *The Twelve Mukam*, their great folk-song cycle and the ancient Nasi melody *Peisibibbsili*. They have also collected more than five thousand documents relating to the music of the national minority peoples, two thousand photographs and many musical instruments.

The institute has published several monographs based on these materials, and edited and published many scores. With the assistance of other organizations, it is now compiling a collection of Chinese folk music in twenty-nine volumes.

Brick Carvings in Old Yangchow

Some fine specimens of carved brick have been brought to light in Yangchow, Kiangsu Province, during a survey undertaken there by the Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Objects. The search was for carved-brick designs on the facades of buildings, temples and garden walls. Yangchow is a good place in which to seek such treasure. It is an ancient city. Bricks with carved designs were used there more than two thousand years ago to adorn its buildings. Between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries carved bricks were

widely used on the facades of its mansions, on outer walls, on screen walls in front of gates, over windows and on balustrades. They form an important feature of local architectural art. The carved bricks used on the facades of buildings are of especially fine quality with a rich variety of intricate designs representing birds, flowers, landscapes and figures.

One of the specimens brought to light by the survey is a "brick picture" decorating the porch of a mansion of the Ching dynasty (1644-1911). Composed of nine bricks, it depicts ten deer resting in a quiet forest; some are grazing on the grass, some are drinking from a stream, some are standing motionless and some frolicking, while one yearling nestles close to its mother. Another fine carved-brick design was found over a porch. The top part consists of a brick arch on which are depicted the eight immortals of Chinese folk legend and five bats flitting around a "longevity" pattern in a long narrow design. Bats are ancient symbols of good fortune. Under these two units is a large, polished hexagonal slab carved with scenes from three traditional dramas with the whole framed by a decorative design. On the upper part of the two brick pillars supporting the arch are carved the gods of harmony who also symbolize happiness.

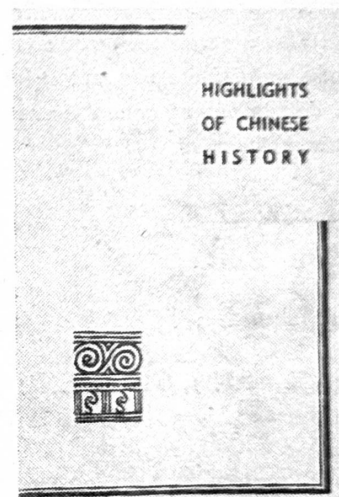
The committee has taken the necessary steps to preserve and protect all buildings with fine brick carvings. Some of the best specimens have been placed in the local museum.

Foochow Handicrafts

Foochow, China's "City of Handicrafts," recently gave a brilliant showing of its skills at an exhibition in the capital's Peihai Park. More than a thousand pieces of handicraft art were on view—examples of Foochow's "Three Treasures," carved lacquerware, umbrellas and horn combs, as well as other of its well-known crafts like carvings in wood, ivory and stone, porcelain figurines and decorated lacquered chopsticks—some thirty kinds of products in all. The lacquerware especially was notable—durable and well designed with attractive decorations. While carrying on their own local traditions, Foochow's craftsmen have also learnt from the fine features of lacquerware art produced elsewhere in China. New products included in this exhibition were screens and bonbon boxes using a combination of lacquer, ivory, horn and stone.

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